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THE WORKS OF GILBERT PARKER

IMPERIAL EDITION

VOLUME

V

Before he could recover himself a pistol was at his head.

GILBERT PARKER

CUMNER'S SON

AND OTHER SOUTH SEA FOLK

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1916

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INTRODUCTION

In a *Foreword* to *Donovan Pasha*, published in 1902, I used the following words:

"It is now twelve years since I began giving to the public tales of life in lands well known to me. The first of them were drawn from Australia and the islands of the southern Pacific, where I had lived and roamed in the middle and late eighties. . . . Those tales of the Far South were given out with some prodigality. They did not appear in book form, however; for at the time I was sending out these antipodean sketches I was also writing—far from the scenes where they were laid—a series of Canadian tales, many of which appeared in the *Independent* of New York, in the *National Observer*, edited by Mr. Henley, and in the *Illustrated London News*. On the suggestion of my friend Mr. Henley, the Canadian tales, *Pierre and His People*, were published first; with the result that the stories of the southern hemisphere were withheld from publication, though they have been privately printed and duly copyrighted. Some day I may send them forth, but meanwhile I am content to keep them in my care."

These stories made the collection published eventually under the title of *Cumner's Son*, in 1910. They were thus kept for nearly twenty years without being given to the public in book form. In 1910 I decided, however, that they should go out and find their place with my readers. The first story in the book, *Cumner's Son*, which represents about four times the length of an ordinary short story, was published in *Harper's Weekly*, midway between 1890 and 1900. All the earlier stories belonged to 1890, 1891, 1892, and 1893. The first of these to

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be published was *A Sable Spartan, An Amiable Revenge, A Vulgar Fraction,* and *How Pango Wango Was Annexed.* They were written before the Pierre series, and were instantly accepted by Mr. Frederick Greenwood, that great journalistic figure of whom the British public still takes note, and for whom it has an admiring memory, because of his rare gifts as an editor and publicist, and by a political section of the public, because Mr. Greenwood recommended to Disraeli the purchase of the Suez Canal shares. Seventeen years after publishing these stories I had occasion to write to Frederick Greenwood, and in my letter I said: "I can never forget that you gave me a leg up in my first struggle for recognition in the literary world." His reply was characteristic; it was in keeping with the modest, magnanimous nature of the man. He said: "I cannot remember that there was any day when you required a leg up."

While still contributing to the *Anti-Jacobin,* which had a short life and not a very merry one, I turned my attention to a weekly called *The Speaker,* to which I have referred elsewhere, edited by Mr. Wemyss Reid, afterwards Sir Wemyss Reid, and in which Mr. Quiller-Couch was then writing a striking short story nearly every week. Up to that time I had only interviewed two editors. One was Mr. Kinloch-Cooke, now Sir Clement Kinloch-Cooke, who at that time was editor of the *English Illustrated Magazine,* and a very good, courteous, and generous editor he was, and he had a very good magazine; the other was an editor whose name I do not care to mention, because his courtesy was not on the same expansive level as his vanity.

One bitter winter's day in 1891 I went to Wemyss Reid to tell him, if he would hear me, that I had in my mind a series of short stories of Australia and the South Seas, and to ask him if he could give them a place in *The Speaker.* It was a Friday afternoon, and as I went into the smudgy little office I saw a gentleman with a small brown bag emerging from another room.

At that moment I asked for Mr. Wemyss Reid. The gentleman with the little brown bag stood and looked sharply at me, but with friendly if penetrating eyes. "I am Wemyss Reid—you wish to see me?" he said. "Will you give me five minutes?" I asked. "I am just going to the train, but I will spare you a minute," he replied. He turned back into another smudgy little room, put his bag on the table, and said: "Well?" I told him quickly, eagerly, what I wished to do, and I said to him at last: "I apologise for seeking you personally, but I was most anxious that my work should be read by your own eyes, because I think I should be contented with your judgment, whether it was favourable or unfavourable." Taking up his bag again, he replied, "Send your stories along. If I think they are what I want I will publish them. I will read them myself." He turned the handle of the door, and then came back to me and again looked me in the eyes. "If I cannot use them—and there might be a hundred reasons why I could not, and none of them derogatory to your work—" he said, "do not be discouraged. There are many doors. Mine is only one. Knock at the others. Good luck to you."

I never saw Wemyss Reid again, but he made a friend who never forgot him, and who mourned his death. It was not that he accepted my stories; it was that he said what he did say to a young man who did not yet know what his literary fortune might be. Well, I sent him a short story called, *An Epic in Yellow*. Proofs came by return of post. This story was followed by *The High Court of Budgery-Gar*, *Old Roses*, *My Wife's Lovers*, *Derelict*, *Dibbs, R.N.*, *A Little Masquerade*, and *The Stranger's Hut*. Most, if not all, of these appeared before the Pierre stories were written.

They did not strike the imagination of the public in the same way as the Pierre series, but they made many friends. They were mostly Australian, and represented the life which for nearly four years I knew and studied with that affection which

only the young, open-eyed enthusiast, who makes his first journey in the world, can give. In the same year, for *Macmillan's Magazine,* I wrote *Barbara Golding* and *A Pagan of the South,* which was originally published as *The Woman in the Morgue. A Friend of the Commune* was also published in the *English Illustrated Magazine,* and *The Blind Beggar and the Little Red Peg* found a place in the *National Observer* after W. E. Henley had ceased to be its editor, and Mr. J. C. Vincent, also since dead, had taken his place. *The Lone Corvette* was published in *The Westminster Gazette* as late as 1893.

Of certain of these stories, particularly of the Australian group, I have no doubt. They were lifted out of the life of that continent with sympathy and care, and most of the incidents were those which had come under my own observation. I published them at last in book form, because I felt that no definitive edition of my books ought to appear—and I had then a definitive edition in my mind—without these stories which represented an early phase in my work. Whatever their degree of merit, they possess freshness and individuality of outlook. Others could no doubt have written them better, but none could have written them with quite the same touch or turn or individuality; and, after all, what we want in the art of fiction is not a story alone, not an incident of life or soul simply as an incident, but the incident as seen with the eye—and that eye as truthful and direct as possible—of one individual personality. George Meredith and Robert Louis Stevenson might each have chosen the same subject and the same story, and each have produced a masterpiece, and yet the world of difference between the way it was presented by each was the world of difference between the eyes that saw. So I am content to let these stories speak little or much, but still to speak for me.

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CUMNER'S SON

CUMNER'S SON

I

THE CHOOSING OF THE MESSENGER

THERE was trouble at Mandakan. You could not have guessed it from anything the eye could see. In front of the Residency two soldiers marched up and down sleepily, mechanically, between two ten-pounders—marking the limit of their patrol; and an orderly stood at an open door, lazily shifting his eyes from the sentinels to the black guns, which gave out soft, quivering waves of heat, as a wheel, spinning, throws off delicate spray. A hundred yards away the sea spread out, languid and huge. It was under-tinged with all the colours of a morning sunrise over Mount Bobar not far beyond, lifting up its somnolent and massive head into the Eastern sky. "League-long rollers" came in as steady as columns of infantry, with white streamers flying along the line, and hovering a moment, split, and ran on the shore in a crumbling foam, like myriads of white mice hurrying up the sand.

A little cloud of tobacco smoke came curling out of a window of the Residency. It was sniffed up by the orderly, whose pipe was in barracks, and must lie there untouched until evening at least; for he had stood at this door since seven that morning, waiting orders; and he knew by the look on Colonel Cumner's face that he might be there till to-morrow.

But the ordinary spectator could not have noticed

any difference in the general look of things. All was quiet, too, in the big native city. At the doorways the worker in brass and silver hammered away at his metal, a sleepy, musical assonance. The naked seller of sweetmeats went by calling his wares in a gentle, unassertive voice; in dark doorways worn-eyed women and men gossiped in voices scarce above a whisper; and brown children fondled each other, laughing noiselessly, or lay asleep on rugs which would be costly elsewhere. In the bazaars nothing was selling, and no man did anything but mumble or eat, save the few scholars who, cross-legged on their mats, read and laboured towards Nirvana. Priests in their yellow robes and with bare shoulders went by, oblivious of all things.

Yet, too, the keen observer could have seen gathered into shaded corners here and there, a few sombre, low-voiced men talking covertly to each other. They were not the ordinary gossipers; in the faces of some were the marks of furtive design, of sinister suggestion. But it was all so deadly still.

The gayest, cheeriest person in Mandakan was Colonel Cumner's son. Down at the opal beach, under a palm-tree, he sat, telling stories of his pranks at college to Boonda Broke, the half-breed son of a former Dakoon who had ruled the State of Mandakan when first the English came. The saddest person in Mandakan was the present Dakoon, in his palace by the Fountain of the Sweet Waters, which was guarded by four sacred warriors in stone and four brown men armed with the naked kris.

The Dakoon was dying, though not a score of people in the city knew it. He had drunk of the Fountain of Sweet Waters, also of the well that is by Bakbar; he had eaten of the sweetmeat called the Flower of Bam-

baba, his chosen priests had prayed, and his favourite wife had lain all day and all night at the door of his room, pouring out her soul; but nothing came of it.

And elsewhere Boonda Broke was showing Cumner's Son how to throw a kris towards one object and make it hit another. He gave an illustration by aiming at a palm-tree and sticking a passing dog behind the shoulder. The dog belonged to Cumner's Son, and the lad's face suddenly blazed with anger. He ran to the dog, which had silently collapsed like a punctured bag of silk, drew out the kris, then swung towards Boonda Broke, whose cool, placid eyes met his without emotion.

"You knew that was my dog," he said quickly in English, "and—and I tell you what, sir, I've had enough of you. A man that'd hit a dog like that would hit a man the same way."

He was standing with the crimson kris in his hand above the dog. His passion was frank, vigorous, and natural.

Boonda Broke smiled passively.

"You mean, *could* hit a man the same way, honoured lord."

"I mean what I said," answered the lad, and he turned on his heel; but presently he faced about again, as though with a wish to give his foe the benefit of any doubt. Though Boonda Broke was smiling, the lad's face flushed again with anger, for the man's real character had been revealed to him on the instant, and he was yet in the indignant warmth of the new experience. If he had known that Boonda Broke had cultivated his friendship for months, to worm out of him all the secrets of the Residency, there might have been a violent and immediate conclusion to the incident, for the lad was fiery, and he had no fear in his heart; he

was combative, high-tempered, and daring. Boonda Broke had learned no secrets of him, had been met by an unconscious but steady resistance, and at length his patience had given way in spite of himself. He had white blood in his veins—fighting Irish blood—which sometimes overcame his smooth, Oriental secretiveness and cautious duplicity; and this was one of those occasions. He had flung the knife at the dog with a wish in his heart that it was Cumner's Son instead. As he stood looking after the English lad, he said between his teeth with a great hatred, though his face showed no change:

"English dog, thou shalt be dead like thy brother there when I am Dakoon of Mandakan."

At this moment he saw hurrying towards him one of those natives who, a little while before, had been in close and furtive talk in the Bazaar.

Meanwhile the little cloud of smoke kept curling out of the Governor's door, and the orderly could catch the fitful murmur of talk that followed it. Presently rifle shots rang out somewhere. Instantly a tall, broad-shouldered figure, in white undress uniform, appeared in the doorway and spoke quickly to the orderly. In a moment two troopers were galloping out of the Residency Square and into the city. Before two minutes had passed one had ridden back to the orderly, who reported to the Colonel that the Dakoon had commanded the shooting of five men of the tribe of the outlaw hill-chief, Pango Dooni, against the rear wall of the Palace, where the Dakoon might look from his window and see the deed.

The Colonel sat up eagerly in his chair, then brought his knuckles down smartly on the table. He looked sharply at the three men who sat with him.

"That clinches it," said he. "One of those fellows was Pango Dooni's nephew, another was his wife's brother. It's the only thing to do—some one must go to Pango Dooni, tell him the truth, ask him to come down and save the place, and sit up there in the Dakoon's place. He'll stand by us, and by England."

No one answered at first. Every face was gloomy. At last a grey-haired captain of artillery spoke his mind in broken sentences:

"Never do—have to ride through a half-dozen sneaking tribes—Pango Dooni, rank robber—steal like a barrack cat—besides, no man could get there. Better stay where we are and fight it out till help comes."

"Help!" said Cumner bitterly. "We might wait six months before a man-of-war put in. The danger is a matter of hours. A hundred men, and a score of niggers—what would that be against thirty thousand natives?"

"Pango Dooni is as likely to butcher us as the Dakoon," said McDermot, the captain of artillery. Every man in the garrison had killed at least one of Pango Dooni's men, and every man of them was known from the Kimar Gate to the Neck of Baroob, where Pango Dooni lived and ruled.

The Colonel was not to be moved. "I'd ride the ninety miles myself, if my place weren't here—no, don't think I doubt you, for I know you all! But consider the nest of murderers that'll be let loose here when the Dakoon dies. Better a strong robber with a strong robber's honour to perch there in the Palace, than Boonda Broke and his cut-throats—"

"Honour—honour?—Pango Dooni!" broke out McDermot the gunner scornfully.

"I know the man," said the Governor gruffly; "I

know the man, I tell you, and I'd take his word for ten thousand pounds, or a thousand head of cattle. Is there any of you will ride to the Neck of Baroob for me? For one it must be, and no more—we can spare scarce that, God knows!" he added sadly. "The women and children—"

"I will go," said a voice behind them all; and Cumner's Son stepped forward. "I will go, if I may ride the big sorrel from the Dakoon's stud."

The Colonel swung round in his chair and stared mutely at the lad. He was only eighteen years old, but of good stature, well-knit, and straight as a sapling.

Seeing that no one answered him, but sat and stared incredulously, he laughed a little, frankly and boyishly.

"The kris of Boonda Broke is for the hearts of every one of us," said he. "He may throw it soon—to-night—to-morrow. No man can leave here—all are needed; but a boy can ride; he is light in the saddle, and he may pass where a man would be caught in a rain of bullets. I have ridden the sorrel of the Dakoon often; he has pressed it on me; I will go to the master of his stud, and I will ride to the Neck of Baroob."

"No, no," said one after the other, getting to his feet, "I will go."

The Governor waved them down. "The lad is right," said he, and he looked him closely and proudly in the eyes. "By the mercy of God, you shall ride the ride," said he. "Once when Pango Dooni was in the city, in disguise, aye, even in the Garden of the Dakoon, the night of the Dance of the Yellow Fire, I myself helped him to escape, for I stand for a fearless robber before a cowardly saint." His grey moustache and eyebrows bristled with energy as he added: "The lad shall go. He shall carry in his breast the bracelet with the red

stone that Pango Dooni gave me. On the stone is written the countersign that all hillsmen heed, and the tribe-call I know also."

"The danger—the danger—and the lad so young!" said McDermot; but yet his eyes rested lovingly on the boy.

The Colonel threw up his head in anger. "If I, his father, can let him go, why should you prate like women? The lad is my son, and he shall win his spurs —and more, and more, maybe," he added.

He took from his pocket Pango Dooni's gift and gave it to the lad, and three times he whispered in his ear the tribe-call and the countersign that he might know them. The lad repeated them three times, and, with his finger, traced the countersign upon the stone.

That night he rode silently out of the Dakoon's palace yard by a quiet gateway, and came, by a roundabout, to a point near the Residency.

He halted under a flame-tree, and a man came out of the darkness and laid a hand upon his knee.

"Ride straight and swift from the Kimar Gate. Pause by the Koongat Bridge an hour, rest three hours at the Bar of Balmud, and pause again where the roof of the Brown Hermit drums to the sorrel's hoofs. Ride for the sake of the women and children and for your own honour. Ride like a Cumner, lad."

The last sound of the sorrel's hoofs upon the red dust beat in the Colonel's ears all night long, as he sat waiting for news from the Palace, the sentinels walking up and down, the orderly at the door, and Boonda Broke plotting in the town.

II

"REST AT THE KOONGAT BRIDGE AN HOUR"

THERE was no moon, and but few stars were shining. When Cumner's Son first set out from Mandakan he could scarcely see at all, and he kept his way through the native villages more by instinct than by sight. As time passed he saw more clearly; he could make out the figures of natives lying under trees or rising from their mats to note the flying horseman. Lights flickered here and there in the houses and by the roadside. A late traveller turned a cake in the ashes or stirred some rice in a calabash; an anxious mother put some sandal-wood on the coals and added incense, that the gods might be good to the ailing child on the mat; and thrice, at forges in the village, he saw the smith languidly beating iron into shape, while dark figures sat on the floor near by, and smoked and murmured to each other.

These last showed alertness at the sound of the flying sorrel's hoofs, and all at once a tall, keen-eyed horseman sprang to the broad doorway and strained his eyes into the night after Cumner's Son. He waited a few moments; then, as if with a sudden thought, he ran to a horse tethered near by and vaulted into the saddle. At a word his chestnut mare got away with telling stride in pursuit of the unknown rider, passing up the Gap of Mandakan like a ghost.

Cumner's Son had a start by about half a mile, but Tang-a-Dahit rode a mare that had once belonged to Pango Dooni, and Pango Dooni had got her from Colonel Cumner the night he escaped from Mandakan.

For this mare the hill-chief had returned no gift save the gold bracelet which Cumner's Son now carried in his belt.

The mare leaned low on her bit, and travelled like a thirsty hound to water, the sorrel tugged at the snaffle, and went like a bullmoose hurrying to his herd—

> "That long low gallop that can tire
> The hounds' deep hate or hunter's fire."

The pace was with the sorrel. Cumner's Son had not looked behind after the first few miles, for then he had given up thought that he might be followed. He sat in his saddle like a plainsman; he listened like a hillsman; he endured like an Arab water-carrier. There was not an ounce of useless flesh on his body, and every limb, bone, and sinew had been stretched and hardened by riding with the Dakoon's horsemen, by travelling through the jungle for the tiger and the panther, by throwing the kris with Boonda Broke, fencing with McDermot, and by sabre practice with red-headed Sergeant Doolan in the barracks by the Residency Square. After twenty miles' ride he was dry as a bone, after thirty his skin was moist but not damp, and there was not a drop of sweat on the skin-leather of his fatigue cap. When he got to Koongat Bridge he was like a racer after practice, ready for a fight from start to finish. Yet he was not foolhardy. He knew the danger that beset him, for he could not tell, in the crisis come to Mandakan, what designs might be abroad. He now saw through Boonda Broke's friendship for him, and he only found peace for his mind upon the point by remembering that he had told no secrets, had given no information of any use to the foes of the Dakoon or the haters of the English.

On this hot, long, silent ride he looked back carefully, but he could not see where he had been to blame; and, if he were, he hoped to strike a balance with his own conscience for having been friendly to Boonda Broke, and to justify himself in his father's eyes. If he came through all right, then "the Governor"—as he called his father, with the friendly affection of a good comrade, and as all others in Mandakan called him because of his position—the Governor then would say that whatever harm he had done indirectly was now undone.

He got down at the Koongat Bridge, and his fingers were still in the sorrel's mane when he heard the call of a bittern from the river bank. He did not loose his fingers, but stood still and listened intently, for there was scarcely a sound of the plain, the river, or jungle he did not know, and his ear was keen to balance 'twixt the false note and the true. He waited for the sound again. From that first call he could not be sure which had startled him—the night was so still—the voice of a bird or the call between men lying in ambush. He tried the trigger of his pistol softly, and prepared to mount. As he did so, the call rang out across the water again, a little louder, a little longer.

Now he was sure. It was not from a bittern—it was a human voice, of whose tribe he knew not—Pango Dooni's, Boonda Broke's, the Dakoon's, or the segments of peoples belonging to none of these—highway robbers, cattle-stealers, or the men of the jungle, those creatures as wild and secret as the beasts of the bush and more cruel and more furtive.

The fear of the ambushed thing is the worst fear of this world—the sword or the rifle-barrel you cannot see and the poisoned wooden spear which the men of

the jungle throw gives a man ten deaths instead of one.

Cumner's Son mounted quickly, straining his eyes to see and keeping his pistol cocked. When he heard the call a second time he had for a moment a thrill of fear, not in his body, but in his brain. He had that fatal gift, imagination, which is more alive than flesh and bone, stronger than iron and steel. In his mind he saw a hundred men rise up from ambush, surround him, and cut him down. He saw himself firing a half-dozen shots, then drawing his sword and fighting till he fell; but he did fall in the end, and there was an end of it. It seemed like years while these visions passed through his mind, but it was no longer than it took to gather the snaffle-rein close to the sorrel's neck, draw his sword, clinch it in his left hand with the rein, and gather the pistol snugly in his right. He listened again. As he touched the sorrel with his knee he thought he heard a sound ahead.

The sorrel sprang forward, sniffed the air, and threw up his head. His feet struck the resounding timbers of the bridge, and, as they did so, he shied; but Cumner's Son, looking down sharply, could see nothing to either the right or left—no movement anywhere save the dim trees on the banks waving in the light wind which had risen. A crocodile slipped off a log into the water—he knew that sound; a rank odour came from the river bank—he knew the smell of the hippopotamus.

These very things gave him new courage. Since he came from Eton to Mandakan he had hunted often and well, and once he had helped to quarry the Little Men of the Jungle when they carried off the wife and daughter of a soldier of the Dakoon. The smell and the sound of wild life roused all the hunter in him. He

had fear no longer; the primitive emotion of fighting or self-defence was alive in him.

He had left the bridge behind by twice the horse's length, when, all at once, the call of the red bittern rang out the third time, louder than before; then again; and then the cry of a grey wolf came in response.

His peril was upon him. He put spurs to the sorrel. As he did so, dark figures sprang up on all sides of him. Without a word he drove the excited horse at his assailants. Three caught his bridle-rein, and others snatched at him to draw him from his horse.

"Hands off!" he cried, in the language of Mandakan, and levelled his pistol.

"He is English!" said a voice. "Cut him down!"

"I am the Governor's son," said the lad. "Let go."

"Cut him down!" snarled the voice again.

He fired twice quickly.

Then he remembered the tribe-call given his father by Pango Dooni. Rising in his saddle and firing again, he called it out in a loud voice. His plunging horse had broken away from two of the murderers; but one still held on, and he slashed the hand free with his sword.

The natives were made furious by the call, and came on again, striking at him with their krises. He shouted the tribe-call once more, but this time it was done involuntarily. There was no response in front of him; but one came from behind. There was clattering of hoofs on Koongat Bridge, and the password of the clan came back to the lad, even as a kris struck him in the leg and drew out again. Once again he called, and suddenly a horseman appeared beside him, who clove through a native's head with a broadsword, and with a pistol fired at the fleeing figures; for Boonda Broke's men who were thus infesting the highway up to Koon-

gat Bridge, and even beyond, up to the Bar of Balmud, hearing the newcomer shout the dreaded name of Pango Dooni, scattered for their lives, though they were yet twenty to two. One stood his ground, and it would have gone ill for Cumner's Son, for this thief had him at fatal advantage, had it not been for the horseman who had followed the lad from the forge-fire to Koongat Bridge. He stood up in his stirrups and cut down with his broadsword, so that the blade was driven through the head and shoulders of his foe as a woodsman splits a log half through, and grunts with the power of his stroke.

Then he turned to the lad.

"What stranger calls by the word of our tribe?" he asked.

"I am Cumner's Son," was the answer, "and my father is brother-in-blood with Pango Dooni. I ride to Pango Dooni for the women and children's sake."

"Proof! Proof! If you be Cumner's Son, another word should be yours."

The Colonel's Son took out the bracelet from his breast. "It is safe hid here," said he, "and hid also under my tongue. If you be from the Neck of Baroob you will know it when I speak it;" and he spoke reverently the sacred countersign.

By a little fire kindled in the road, the bodies of their foes beside them, they vowed to each other, mingling their blood from dagger pricks in the arm. Then they mounted again and rode towards the Neck of Baroob.

In silence they rode awhile, and at last the hillsman said: "If fathers be brothers-in-blood, behold it is good that sons be also."

By this the lad knew that he was now brother-in-blood to the son of Pango Dooni.

III

THE CODE OF THE HILLS

"You travel near to Mandakan!" said the lad. "Do you ride with a thousand men?"

"For a thousand men there are ten thousand eyes to see; I travel alone and safe," answered Tang-a-Dahit.

"To thrust your head in the tiger's jaw," said Cumner's Son. "Did you ride to be in at the death of the men of your clan?"

"A man will ride for a face that he loves, even to the Dreadful Gates," answered Tang-a-Dahit. "But what is this of the men of my clan?"

Then the lad told him of those whose heads hung on the rear Palace wall, where the Dakoon lay dying, and why he rode to Pango Dooni.

"It is fighting and fighting, naught but fighting," said Tang-a-Dahit after a pause; "and there is no peace. It is fighting and fighting, for honour, and glory, and houses and cattle, but naught for love, and naught that there may be peace."

Cumner's Son turned round in his saddle as if to read the face of the man, but it was too dark.

"And naught that there may be peace." Those were the words of a hillsman who had followed him furiously in the night ready to kill, who had cloven the head of a man like a piece of soap, and had been riding even into Mandakan where a price was set on his head.

For long they rode silently, and in that time Cumner's Son found new thoughts; and these thoughts made him love the brown hillsman as he had never loved any save his own father.

"When there is peace in Mandakan," said he at last, "when Boonda Broke is snapped in two like a pencil, when Pango Dooni sits as Dakoon in the Palace of Mandakan—"

"There is a maid in Mandakan," interrupted Tang-a-Dahit, "and these two years she has lain upon her bed, and she may not be moved, for the bones of her body are as the soft stems of the lily, but her face is a perfect face, and her tongue has the wisdom of God."

"You ride to her through the teeth of danger?"

"She may not come to me, and I must go to her," answered the hillsman.

There was silence again for a long time, for Cumner's Son was turning things over in his mind; and all at once he felt that each man's acts must be judged by the blood that is in him and the trail by which he has come.

The sorrel and the chestnut mare travelled together as on one snaffle-bar, step by step, for they were foaled in the same stable. Through stretches of reed-beds and wastes of osiers they passed, and again by a path through the jungle where the briar-vines caught at them like eager fingers, and a tiger crossed their track, disturbed in his night's rest. At length out of the dank distance they saw the first colour of dawn.

"Ten miles," said Tang-a-Dahit, "and we shall come to the Bar of Balmud. Then we shall be in my own country. See, the dawn comes up! 'Twixt here and the Bar of Balmud our danger lies. A hundred men may ambush there, for Boonda Broke's thieves have scattered all the way from Mandakan to our borders."

Cumner's Son looked round. There were hills and defiles everywhere, and a thousand places where foes could hide. The quickest way, but the most perilous,

lay through the long defile between the hills, flanked by boulders and rank scrub. Tang-a-Dahit pointed out the ways that they might go—by the path to the left along the hills, or through the green defile; and Cumner's Son instantly chose the latter way.

"If the fight were fair," said the hillsman, "and it were man to man, the defile is the better way; but these be dogs of cowards who strike from behind rocks. No one of them has a heart truer than Boonda Broke's, the master of the carrion. We will go by the hills. The way is harder but more open, and if we be prospered we will rest awhile at the Bar of Balmud, and at noon we will tether and eat in the Neck of Baroob."

They made their way through the medlar trees and scrub to the plateau above, and, the height gained, they turned to look back. The sun was up, and trailing rose and amber garments across the great Eastern arch. Their path lay towards it, for Pango Dooni hid in the hills, where the sun hung a roof of gold above his stronghold.

"Forty to one!" said Tang-a-Dahit suddenly. "Now indeed we ride for our lives!"

Looking down the track of the hillsman's glance Cumner's Son saw a bunch of horsemen galloping up the slope. Boonda Broke's men!

The sorrel and the mare were fagged, the horses of their foes were fresh; and forty to one were odds that no man would care to take. It might be that some of Pango Dooni's men lay between them and the Bar of Balmud, but the chance was faint.

"By the hand of Heaven," said the hillsman, "if we reach to the Bar of Balmud, these dogs shall eat their own heads for dinner!"

They set their horses in the way, and gave the sorrel

and mare the bit and spur. The beasts leaned again to their work as though they had just come from a feeding-stall and knew their riders' needs. The men rode light and free, and talked low to their horses as friend talks to friend. Five miles or more they went so, and then the mare stumbled. She got to her feet again, but her head dropped low, her nostrils gaped red and swollen, and the sorrel hung back with her, for a beast, like a man, will travel farther two by two than one by one. At another point where they had a long view behind they looked back. Their pursuers were gaining. Tang-a-Dahit spurred his horse on.

"There is one chance," said he, "and only one. See where the point juts out beyond the great medlar tree. If, by the mercy of God, we can but make it!"

The horses gallantly replied to call and spur. They rounded a curve which made a sort of apse to the side of the valley, and presently they were hid from their pursuers. Looking back from the thicket they saw the plainsmen riding hard. All at once Tang-a-Dahit stopped.

"Give me the sorrel," said he. "Quick—dismount!"

Cumner's Son did as he was bid. Going a little to one side, the hillsman pushed through a thick hedge of bushes, rolled away a rock, and disclosed an opening which led down a steep and rough-hewn way to a great misty valley beneath, where was never a bridle-path or causeway over the brawling streams and boulders.

"I will ride on. The mare is done, but the sorrel can make the Bar of Balmud."

Cumner's Son opened his mouth to question, but stopped, for the eyes of the hillsman flared up, and Tang-a-Dahit said:

"My arm in blood has touched thy arm, and thou

art in my hills and not in thine own country. Thy life is my life, and thy good is my good. Speak not, but act. By the high wall of the valley where no man bides there is a path which leads to the Bar of Balmud; but leave it not, whether it go up or down or be easy or hard. If thy feet be steady, thine eye true, and thy heart strong, thou shalt come by the Bar of Balmud among my people."

Then he caught the hand of Cumner's Son in his own and kissed him between the eyes after the manner of a kinsman, and, urging him into the hole, rolled the great stone into its place again. Mounting the sorrel he rode swiftly out into the open, rounded the green point full in view of his pursuers, and was hid from them in an instant. Then, dismounting, he swiftly crept back through the long grass into the thicket again, mounted the mare, and drove her at laboured gallop also around the curve, so that it seemed to the plainsmen following that both men had gone that way. He mounted the sorrel again, and loosing a long sash from his waist drew it through the mare's bit. The mare, lightened of the weight, followed well. When the plainsmen came to the cape of green, they paused not by the secret place, for it seemed to them that two had ridden past and not one.

The Son of Pango Dooni had drawn pursuit after himself, for it is the law of the hills that a hillsman shall give his life or all that he has for a brother-in-blood.

When Cumner's Son had gone a little way he understood it all! And he would have turned back, but he knew that the hillsman had ridden far beyond his reach. So he ran as swiftly as he could; he climbed where it might seem not even a chamois could find a hold; his eyes scarcely seeing the long, misty valley, where the

haze lay like a vapour from another world. There was no sound anywhere save the brawling water or the lonely cry of the flute-bird. Here was the last refuge of the hillsmen if they should ever be driven from the Neck of Baroob. They could close up every entrance, and live unscathed; for here was land for tilling, and wood, and wild fruit, and food for cattle.

Cumner's Son was supple and swift, and scarce an hour had passed ere he came to a steep place on the other side, with rough niches cut in the rocks, by which a strong man might lift himself up to safety. He stood a moment and ate some coffee-beans and drank some cold water from a stream at the foot of the crag, and then began his ascent. Once or twice he trembled, for he was worn and tired; but he remembered the last words of Tang-a-Dahit, and his fingers tightened their hold. At last, with a strain and a gasp, he drew himself up, and found himself on a shelf of rock with all the great valley spread out beneath him. A moment only he looked, resting himself, and then he searched for a way into the hills; for everywhere there was a close palisade of rocks and saplings. At last he found an opening scarce bigger than might let a cat through; but he laboured hard, and at last drew himself out and looked down the path which led into the Bar of Balmud—the great natural escarpment of giant rocks and monoliths and medlar trees, where lay Pango Dooni's men.

He ran with all his might, and presently he was inside the huge defence. There was no living being to be seen; only the rock-strewn plain and the woods beyond.

He called aloud, but nothing answered; he called again the tribe-call of Pango Dooni's men, and a hundred armed men sprang up.

"I am a brother-in-blood of Pango Dooni's Son," said he. "Tang-a-Dahit rides for his life to the Bar of Balmud. Ride forth if ye would save him."

"The lad speaks with the tongue of a friend," said a scowling hillsman, advancing, "yet how know we but he lies?"

"Even by this," said Cumner's Son, and he spoke the sacred countersign and showed again the bracelet of Pango Dooni, and told what had happened. Even as he spoke the hillsmen gave the word, and two score men ran down behind the rocks, mounted, and were instantly away by the road that led to the Koongat Bridge.

The tall hillsman turned to the lad.

"You are beaten by travel," said he. "Come, eat and drink, and rest."

"I have sworn to breakfast where Pango Dooni bides, and there only will I rest and eat," answered the lad.

"The son of Pango Dooni knows the lion's cub from the tame dog's whelp. You shall keep your word. Though the sun ride fast towards noon, faster shall we ride in the Neck of Baroob," said the hillsman.

It was half-way towards noon when the hoof-beats drummed over the Brown Hermit's cave, and they rested not there; but it was noon and no more when they rode through Pango Dooni's gates and into the square where he stood.

The tall hillsman dropped to the ground, and Cumner's Son made to do the same. Yet he staggered, and would have fallen, but the hillsman ran an arm around his shoulder. The lad put by the arm, and drew himself up. He was most pale. Pango Dooni stood looking at him, without a word, and Cumner's Son doffed

his cap. There was no blood in his lips, and his face was white and drawn.

"Since last night what time the bugle blows in the Palace yard, I have ridden," said he.

At the sound of his voice the great chief started.

"The voice I know, but not the face," said he.

"I am Cumner's Son," replied the lad, and once more he spoke the sacred countersign.

IV

BY THE OLD WELL OF JAHAR

To Cumner's Son when all was told, Pango Dooni said: "If my son be dead where those jackals swarm, it is well he died for his friend. If he be living, then it is also well. If he be saved, we will march to Mandakan, with all our men, he and I, and it shall be as Cumner wills, if I stay in Mandakan or if I return to my hills."

"My father said in the council-room, 'Better the strong robber than the weak coward,' and my father never lied," said the lad dauntlessly. The strong, tall chief, with the dark face and fierce eyes, roused in him the regard of youth for strong manhood.

"A hundred years ago they stole from my fathers the State of Mandakan," answered the chief, "and all that is here and all that is there is mine. If I drive the kine of thieves from the plains to my hills, the cattle were mine ere I drove them. If I harry the rich in the midst of the Dakoon's men, it is gaining my own over naked swords. If I save your tribe and Cumner's men from the half-bred jackal Boonda Broke, and hoist your flag on the Palace wall, it is only I who should do it."

Then he took the lad inside the house, with the great wooden pillars and the high gates, and the dark windows all barred up and down with iron, and he led him to a court-yard where was a pool of clear water. He made him bathe in it, and dark-skinned natives brought him bread dipped in wine, and when he had eaten they laid him on skins and rubbed him dry, and rolled him in soft linen, and he drank the coffee they gave him, and they sat by and fanned him until he fell asleep.

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The red birds on the window-sill sang through his sleep into his dreams. In his dreams he thought he was in the Dakoon's Palace at Mandakan with a thousand men before him, and three men came forward and gave him a sword. And a bird came flying through the great chambers and hung over him, singing in a voice that he understood, and he spoke to the three and to the thousand, in the words of the bird, and said:

"It is fighting, and fighting for honour and glory and houses and kine, but naught for love, and naught that there may be peace."

And the men said in reply: "It is all for love and it is all for peace," and they still held out the sword to him. So he took it and buckled it to his side, and the bird, flying away out of the great window of the chamber, sang: "Peace! Peace! Peace!" And Pango Dooni's Son standing by, with a shining face, said, "Peace! Peace!" and the great Cumner said, "Peace!" and a woman's voice, not louder than a bee's, but clear above all others, said, "Peace!"

. . . . . .

He awoke and knew it was a dream; and there beside him stood Pango Dooni, in his dress of scarlet

and gold and brown, his broadsword buckled on, a kris at his belt, and a rich jewel in his cap.

"Ten of my captains and three of my kinsmen are come to break bread with Cumner's Son," said he. "They would hear the tale of our kinsmen who died against the Palace wall, by the will of the sick Dakoon."

The lad sprang to his feet fresh and well, the linen and skins falling away from his lithe, clean body and limbs, and he took from the slaves his clothes. The eye of the chief ran up and down his form, from his keen blue eyes to his small strong ankle.

"It is the body of a perfect man," said he. "In the days when our State was powerful and great, when men and not dogs ruled at Mandakan, no man might be Dakoon save him who was clear of mote or beam; of true bone and body, like a high-bred yearling got from a perfect stud. But two such are there that I have seen in Mandakan to-day, and they are thyself and mine own son."

The lad laughed. "I have eaten good meat," said he, "and I have no muddy blood."

When they came to the dining-hall, the lad at first was abashed, for twenty men stood up to meet him, and each held out his hand and spoke the vow of a brother-in-blood, for the ride he had made and his honest face together acted on them. Moreover, whom the head of their clan honoured they also willed to honour. They were tall, barbaric-looking men, and some had a truculent look, but most were of a daring open manner, and careless in speech and gay at heart.

Cumner's Son told them of his ride and of Tang-a-Dahit, and, at last, of the men of their tribe who died by the Palace wall. With one accord they rose in their places and swore over bread and a drop of blood of their

chief that they would not sheathe their swords again till a thousand of Boonda Broke's and the Dakoon's men lay where their own kinsmen had fallen. If it chanced that Tang-a-Dahit was dead, then they would never rest until Boonda Broke and all his clan were blotted out. Only Pango Dooni himself was silent, for he was thinking much of what should be done at Mandakan.

They came out upon the plateau where the fortress stood, and five hundred mounted men marched past, with naked swords and bare krises in their belts, and then wheeled suddenly and stood still, and shot their swords up into the air the full length of the arm, and called the battle-call of their tribe. The chief looked on unmoved, save once when a tall trooper rode near him. He suddenly called this man forth.

"Where hast thou been, brother?" he asked.

"Three days was I beyond the Bar of Balmud, searching for the dog who robbed my mother; three days did I ride to keep my word with a foe, who gave me his horse when we were both unarmed and spent, and with broken weapons could fight no more; and two days did I ride to be by a woman's side when her great sickness should come upon her. This is all, my lord, since I went forth, save this jewel which I plucked from the cap of a gentleman from the Palace. It was toll he paid even at the gates of Mandakan."

"Didst thou do all that thou didst promise?"

"All, my lord."

"Even to the woman?" The chief's eye burned upon the man.

"A strong male child is come into the world to serve my lord," said the trooper, and he bowed his head.

"The jewel is thine and not mine, brother," said the

chief softly, and the fierceness of his eyes abated; "but I will take the child."

The trooper drew back among his fellows, and the columns rode towards the farther end of the plateau. Then all at once the horses plunged into wild gallop, and the hillsmen came thundering down towards the chief and Cumner's Son, with swords waving and cutting to right and left, calling aloud, their teeth showing, death and valour in their eyes. The chief glanced at Cumner's Son. The horses were not twenty feet from the lad, but he did not stir a muscle. They were not ten feet from him, and swords flashed before his eyes, but still he did not stir a hair's breadth. In response to a cry the horses stopped in full career, not more than three feet from him. Reaching out he could have stroked the flaming nostril of the stallion nearest him.

Pango Dooni took from his side a short gold-handled sword and handed it to him.

"A hundred years ago," said he, "it hung in the belt of the Dakoon of Mandakan; it will hang as well in thine." Then he added, for he saw a strange look in the lad's eyes: "The father of my father's father wore it in the Palace, and it has come from his breed to me, and it shall go from me to thee, and from thee to thy breed, if thou wilt honour me."

The lad stuck it in his belt with pride, and taking from his pocket a silver-mounted pistol, said:

"This was the gift of a fighting chief to a fighting chief when they met in a beleaguered town, with spoil, and blood, and misery, and sick women and children round them; and it goes to a strong man, if he will take the gift of a lad."

At that moment there was a cry from beyond the troopers, and it was answered from among them by a

kinsman of Pango Dooni, and presently, the troopers parting, down the line came Tang-a-Dahit, with bandaged head and arm.

In greeting, Pango Dooni raised the pistol which Cumner's Son had given him and fired it into the air. Straightway five hundred men did the same.

Dismounting, Tang-a-Dahit stood before his father.

"Have the Dakoon's vermin fastened on the young bull at last?" asked Pango Dooni, his eyes glowering.

"They crawled and fastened, but they have not fed," answered Tang-a-Dahit in a strong voice, for his wounds had not sunk deep. "By the Old Well of Jahar, which has one side to the mountain wall, and one to the cliff edge, I halted and took my stand. The mare and the sorrel of Cumner's Son I put inside the house that covers the well, and I lifted two stones from the floor and set them against the entrance. A beggar lay dead beside the well, and his dog licked his body. I killed the cur, for, following its master, it would have peace, and peace is more than life. Then, with the pole of the water-pail, I threw the dead dog across the entrance upon the paving stones, for these vermin of plainsmen will not pass where a dead dog lies, as my father knows well. They came not by the entrance, but they swarmed elsewhere, as ants swarm upon a sandhill, upon the roofs, and at the little window where the lamp burns.

"I drove them from the window and killed them through the doorway, but they were forty to one. In the end the pest would have carried me to death, as a jackal carries the broken meats to his den, if our hillsmen had not come. For an hour I fought, and five of them I killed and seven wounded, and then at the shouts of our hillsmen they fled at last. Nine of them fell by the hands of our people. Thrice was I wounded,

but my wounds are no deeper than the scratches of a tiger's cub."

"Hadst thou fought for thyself the deed were good," said Pango Dooni, "but thy blood was shed for another, and that is the pride of good men. We have true men here, but thou art a true chief and this shalt thou wear."

He took the rich belt from his waist, and fastened it round the waist of his son.

"Cumner's Son carries the sword that hung in the belt. We are for war, and the sword should be out of the belt. When we are at peace again ye shall put the sword in the belt once more, and hang it upon the wall of the Palace at Mandakan, even as ye who are brothers shall never part."

Two hours Tang-a-Dahit rested upon skins by the bathing pool, and an hour did the slaves knead him and rub him with oil, and give him food and drink; and while yet the sun was but half-way down the sky, they poured through the Neck of Baroob, over five hundred fighting men, on horses that would kneel and hide like dogs, and spring like deer, and that knew each tone of their masters' voices. By the Bar of Balmud they gathered another fifty hillsmen, and again half-way beyond the Old Well of Jahar they met two score more, who had hunted Boonda Broke's men, and these moved into column. So that when they came to Koongat Bridge, in the country infested by the men of the Dakoon, seven hundred stalwart and fearless men rode behind Pango Dooni. From the Neck of Baroob to Koongat Bridge no man stayed them, but they galloped on silently, swiftly, passing through the night like a cloud, upon which the dwellers by the wayside gazed in wonder and in fear.

At Koongat Bridge they rested for two hours, and drank coffee, and broke bread, and Cumner's Son slept by the side of Tang-a-Dahit, as brothers sleep by their mother's bed. And Pango Dooni sat on the ground near them and pondered, and no man broke his meditation. When the two hours were gone, they mounted again and rode on through the dark villages towards Mandakan.

It was just at the close of the hour before dawn that the squad of troopers who rode a dozen rods before the columns, heard a cry from the dark ahead.

"Halt—in the name of the Dakoon!"

V

CHOOSE YE WHOM YE WILL SERVE

The company drew rein. All they could see in the darkness was a single mounted figure in the middle of the road. The horseman rode nearer.

"Who are you?" asked the leader of the company.

"I keep the road for the Dakoon, for it is said that Cumner's Son has ridden to the Neck of Baroob to bring Pango Dooni down."

By this time the chief and his men had ridden up.

The horseman recognised the robber chief, and raised his voice.

"Two hundred of us rode out to face Pango Dooni in this road. We had not come a mile from the Palace when we fell into an ambush, even two thousand men led by Boonda Broke, who would steal the roof and bed of the Dakoon before his death. For an hour we fought but every man was cut down save me."

"And you?" asked Pango Dooni.

"I come to hold the road against Pango Dooni, as the Dakoon bade me."

Pango Dooni laughed. "Your words are large," said he. "What could you, one man, do against Pango Dooni and his hillsmen?"

"I could answer the Dakoon here or elsewhere, that I kept the road till the hill-wolves dragged me down."

"We be the wolves from the hills," answered Pango Dooni. "You would scarce serve a scrap of flesh for one hundred, and we are seven."

"The wolves must rend me first," answered the man, and he spat upon the ground at Pango Dooni's feet.

A dozen men started forward, but the chief called them back.

"You are no coward, but a fool," said he to the horseman. "Which is it better: to die, or to turn with us and save Cumner and the English, and serve Pango Dooni in the Dakoon's Palace?"

"No man knows that he must die till the stroke falls, and I come to fight and not to serve a robber mountaineer."

Pango Dooni's eyes blazed with anger. "There shall be no fighting, but a yelping cur shall be hung to a tree," said he.

He was about to send his men upon the stubborn horseman when the fellow said:

"If you be a man you will give me a man to fight. We were two hundred. If it chance that one of a company shall do as the Dakoon hath said, then is all the company absolved; and beyond the mists we can meet the Dakoon with open eyes and unafraid when he saith, 'Did ye keep your faith?'"

"By the word of a hillsman, but thou shalt have thy

will," said the chief. "We are seven hundred men—choose whom to fight."

"The oldest or the youngest," answered the man. "Pango Dooni or Cumner's Son."

Before the chief had time to speak, Cumner's Son struck the man with the flat of his sword across the breast.

The man did not lift his arm, but looked at the lad steadily for a moment. "Let us speak together before we fight," said he, and to show his good faith he threw down his sword.

"Speak," said Cumner's Son, and laid his sword across the pommel of his saddle.

"Does a man when he dies speak his heart to the ears of a whole tribe?"

"Then choose another ear than mine," said Cumner's Son. "In war I have no secrets from my friends."

A look of satisfaction came into Pango Dooni's face. "Speak with the man alone," said he, and he drew back.

Cumner's Son drew a little to one side with the man, who spoke quickly and low in English.

"I have spoken the truth," said he. "I am Cushnan Di"—he drew himself up—"and once I had a city of my own and five thousand men, but a plague and then a war came, and the Dakoon entered upon my city. I left my people and hid, and changed myself that no one should know me, and I came to Mandakan. It was noised abroad that I was dead. Little by little I grew in favour with the Dakoon, and little by little I gathered strong men about me—two hundred in all at last. It was my purpose, when the day seemed ripe, to seize upon the Palace as the Dakoon had seized upon my little city. I knew from my father, whose father

built a new portion of the Palace, of a secret way by the Aqueduct of the Failing Fountain, even into the Palace itself. An army could ride through and appear in the Palace yard like the mist-shapes from the lost legions. When I had a thousand men I would perform this thing, I thought.

"But day by day the Dakoon drew me to him, and the thing seemed hard to do, even now before I had the men. Then his sickness came, and I could not strike an ailing man. When I saw how he was beset by traitors, in my heart I swore that he should not suffer by my hands. I heard of your riding to the Neck of Baroob—the men of Boonda Broke brought word. So I told the Dakoon, and I told him also that Boonda Broke was ready to steal into his Palace even before he died. He started up, and new life seemed given him. Calling his servants, he clothed himself, and he came forth and ordered out his troops. He bade me take my men to keep the road against Pango Dooni. Then he ranged his men before the Palace, and scattered them at points in the city to resist Boonda Broke.

"So I rode forth, but I came first to my daughter's bedside. She lies in a little house not a stone's throw from the Palace, and near to the Aqueduct of the Failing Fountain. Once she was beautiful and tall and straight as a bamboo stem, but now she is in body no more than a piece of silken thread. Yet her face is like the evening sky after a rain. She is much alone, and only in the early mornings may I see her. She is cared for by an old woman of our people, and there she bides, and thinks strange thoughts, and speaks words of wisdom.

"When I told her what the Dakoon bade me do, and

what I had sworn to perform when the Dakoon was dead, she said:

"'But no. Go forth as the Dakoon hath bidden. Stand in the road and oppose the hillsmen. If Cumner's Son be with them, thou shalt tell him all. If he speak for the hillsmen and say that all shall be well with thee, and thy city be restored when Pango Dooni sits in the Palace of the Dakoon, then shalt thou join with them, that there may be peace in the land, for Pango Dooni and the son of Pango Dooni be brave strong men. But if he will not promise for the hillsmen, then shalt thou keep the secret of the Palace, and abide the will of God.'"

"Dost thou know Pango Dooni's son?" asked the lad, for he was sure that this man's daughter was she of whom Tang-a-Dahit had spoken.

"Once when I was in my own city and in my Palace I saw him. Then my daughter was beautiful, and her body was like a swaying wand of the boolda tree. But my city passed, and she was broken like a trailing vine, and the young man came no more."

"But if he came again now?"

"He would not come."

"But if he had come while she lay there like a trailing vine, and listened to her voice, and thought upon her words and loved her still. If for her sake he came secretly, daring death, wouldst thou stand—"

The man's eyes lighted. "If there were such truth in any man," he interrupted, "I would fight, follow him, and serve him, and my city should be his city, and the knowledge of my heart be open to his eye.'

Cumner's Son turned and called to Pango Dooni and his son, and they came forward. Swiftly he told them all. When he had done so the man sprang from his

horse, and taking off the thin necklet of beaten gold he wore round his throat, without a word he offered it to Tang-a-Dahit, and Tang-a-Dahit kissed him on the cheek and gave him the thick, loose chain of gold he wore.

"For this was it you risked your life going to Mandakan," said Pango Dooni, angrily, to his son; "for a maid with a body like a withered gourd." Then all at once, with a new look in his face, he continued softly: "Thou hast the soul of a woman, but thy deeds are the deeds of a man. As thy mother was in heart so art thou."

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Day was breaking over Mandakan, and all the city was a tender pink. Tower and minaret were like inverted cups of ruddy gold, and the streets all velvet dust, as Pango Dooni, guided by Cushnan Di, halted at the wood of wild peaches, and a great thicket near to the Aqueduct of the Failing Fountain, and looked out towards the Palace of the Dakoon. It was the time of peach blossoms, and all through the city the pink and white petals fell like the gay crystals of a dissolving sunrise. Yet there rose from the midst of it a long, rumbling, intermittent murmur, and here and there marched columns of men in good order, while again disorderly bands ran hither and hither with krises waving in the sun, and the red turban of war wound round their heads.

They could not see the front of the Palace, nor yet the Residency Square, but, even as they looked, a cannonade began, and the smoke of the guns curled through the showering peach-trees. Hoarse shoutings and cries came rolling over the pink roofs, and Cumner's

Son could hear through all the bugle-call of the artillery.

A moment later Cushnan Di was leading them through a copse of pawpaw trees to a secluded garden by the Aqueduct, overgrown with vines and ancient rose trees, and cherry shrubs. After an hour's labour with spades, while pickets guarded all approach, an opening was disclosed beneath the great flag-stones of a ruined building. Here was a wide natural corridor overhung with stalactites, and it led on into an artificial passage which inclined gradually upwards till it came into a mound above the level by which they entered. Against this mound was backed a little temple in the rear of the Palace. A dozen men had remained behind to cover up the entrance again. When these heard Pango Dooni and the others in the Palace yard they were to ride straight for a gate which should be opened to them.

There was delay in opening the stone door which led into the temple, but at last they forced their way. The place was empty, and they rode through the Palace yard, pouring out like a stream of spectral horsemen from the altar of the temple. Not a word was spoken as Pango Dooni and his company galloped towards the front of the Palace. Hundreds of the Dakoon's soldiers and terrified people who had taken refuge in the great court-yard, ran screaming into corners, or threw themselves in terror upon the ground. The walls were lined with soldiers, but not one raised his hand to strike —so sudden was the coming of the dreaded hillsman. They knew him by the black flag and the yellow sunburst upon it.

Presently Pango Dooni gave the wild battle-call of his tribe, and every one of his seven hundred answered

him as they rode impetuously to the Palace front. Two thousand soldiers of the Dakoon, under command of his nephew, Gis-yo-Bahim, were gathered there. They were making ready to march out and defend the Palace. When they saw the flag and heard the battle-cry there was a movement backward, as though this handful of men were an overwhelming army coming at them. Scattered and disorderly groups of men swayed here and there, and just before the entrance of the Palace was a wailing group, by which stood two priests with their yellow robes and bare shoulders, speaking to them. From the walls the soldiers paused from resisting the swarming herds without.

"The Dakoon is dead!" cried Tang-a-Dahit.

As if in response came the wailing death-cry of the women of the Palace through the lattice windows, and it was taken up by the discomfited crowd before the Palace door.

"*The Lord of all the Earth, the great Dakoon, is dead.*"

Pango Dooni rode straight upon the group, who fled at his approach, and, driving the priests indoors, he called aloud:

"The Dakoon is living. Fear not!"

For a moment there was no reply, and he waved his men into place before the Palace, and was about to ride down upon the native army, but Cumner's Son whispered to him, and an instant after the lad was riding alone upon the dark legions. He reined in his horse not ten feet away from the irregular columns.

"You know me," said he. "I am Cumner's Son. I rode into the hills at the Governor's word to bring a strong man to rule you. Why do ye stand here idle? My father, your friend, fights with a hundred men at

the Residency. Choose ye between Boonda Broke, the mongrel, and Pango Dooni, the great hillsman. If ye choose Boonda Broke, then shall your city be levelled to the sea, and ye shall lose your name as a people. Choose!"

One or two voices cried out; then from the people, and presently from the whole dark battalions, came the cry:

"Long live Pango Dooni!"

Pango Dooni rode down with Tang-a-Dahit and Cushnan Di. He bade all but five hundred mounted men to lay down their arms. Then he put over them a guard of near a hundred of his own horsemen. Gathering the men from the rampart he did the same with these, reserving only one hundred to remain upon the walls under guard of ten hillsmen. Then, taking his own six hundred men and five hundred of the Dakoon's horsemen, he bade the gates to be opened, and with Cushnan Di marched out upon the town, leaving Tang-a-Dahit and Cumner's Son in command at the Palace.

At least four thousand besiegers lay before the walls, and, far beyond, they could see the attack upon the Residency.

The gates of the Palace closed on the last of Pango Dooni's men, and with a wild cry they rode like a monstrous wave upon the rebel mob. There was no preparation to resist the onset. The rush was like a storm out of the tropics, and dread of Pango Dooni's name alone was as death among them.

The hillsmen clove the besiegers through like a piece of pasteboard, and turning, rode back again through the broken ranks, their battle-call ringing high above the clash of steel. Again they turned at the Palace wall, and, gathering impetus, they rode at the detached and battered segments of the miserable horde, and once

more cut them down, then furiously galloped towards the Residency.

They could hear one gun firing intermittently, and the roars of Boonda Broke's men. They did not call or cry till within a few hundred yards of the Residency Square. Then their battle-call broke forth, and Boonda Broke turned to see seven hundred bearing down on his ten thousand, the black flag with the yellow sunburst over them.

Cumner, the Governor, and McDermot heard the cry of the hillsmen, too, and took heart.

Boonda Broke tried to divide his force, so that half of them should face the hillsmen, and half the Residency; but there was not time enough; and his men fought as they were attacked, those in front against Pango Dooni, those behind against Cumner. The hillsmen rode upon the frenzied rebels, and were swallowed up by the great mass of them, so that they seemed lost. But slowly, heavily, and with ferocious hatred, they drove their hard path on. A head and shoulders dropped out of sight here and there; but the hillsmen were not counting their losses that day, and when Pango Dooni at last came near to Boonda Broke the men he had lost seemed found again, for it was like water to the thirsty the sight of this man.

But suddenly there was a rush from the Residency Square, and thirty men, under the command of Cumner, rode in with sabres drawn.

There was a sudden swaying movement of the shrieking mass between Boonda Broke and Pango Dooni, and in the confusion and displacement Boonda Broke had disappeared.

Panic and flight came after, and the hillsmen and the little garrison were masters of the field.

"I have paid the debt of the mare," said Pango Dooni, laughing.

"No debt is paid till I see the face of my son," answered Cumner anxiously.

Pango Dooni pointed with his sword.

"In the Palace yard," said he.

"In the Palace yard, alive?" asked Cumner.

Pango Dooni smiled. "Let us go and see."

Cumner wiped the sweat and dust and blood from his face, and turned to McDermot.

"Was I right when I sent the lad?" said he proudly. "The women and children are safe."

VI

CONCERNING THE DAUGHTER OF CUSHNAN DI

The British flag flew half-mast from the Palace dome, and two others flew behind it; one the black and yellow banner of the hillsmen, the other the red and white pennant of the dead Dakoon. In the Palace yard a thousand men stood at attention, and at their head was Cushnan Di with fifty hillsmen. At the Residency another thousand men encamped, with a hundred hillsmen and eighty English, under the command of Tang-a-Dahit and McDermot. By the Fountain of the Sweet Waters, which is over against the Tomb where the Dakoon should sleep, another thousand men were patrolled, with a hundred hillsmen, commanded by a kinsman of Pango Dooni. Hovering near were gloomy, wistful crowds of people, who drew close to the mystery of the House of Death, as though the soul of a Dakoon were of more moment than those of the thousand men who had fallen that day. Along the line of the Bazaar

ranged another thousand men, armed only with krises, under the command of the heir of the late Dakoon, and with these were a hundred and fifty mounted hillsmen, watchful and deliberate. These were also under the command of a kinsman of Pango Dooni.

It was at this very point that the danger lay, for the nephew of the Dakoon, Gis-yo-Bahim, was a weak but treacherous man, ill-fitted to rule; a coward, yet ambitious; distrusted by the people, yet the heir to the throne. Cumner and Pango Dooni had placed him at this point for no other reason than to give him his chance for a blow, if he dared to strike it, at the most advantageous place in the city. The furtive hangers-on, cut-throats, mendicants, followers of Boonda Broke, and haters of the English, lurked in the Bazaars, and Gis-yo-Bahim should be tempted for the first and the last time. Crushed now, he could never rise again. Pango Dooni had carefully picked the hillsmen whom he had sent to the Bazaar, and their captain was the most fearless and the wariest fighter from the Neck of Baroob, save Pango Dooni himself.

Boonda Broke was abroad still. He had escaped from the slaughter before the Residency and was hidden somewhere in the city. There were yet in Mandakan ten thousand men who would follow him that would promise the most, and Boonda Broke would promise the doors of Heaven as a gift to the city, and the treasures of Solomon to the people, if it might serve his purposes. But all was quiet save where the mourners followed their dead to the great funeral pyres, which were set on three little hills just outside the city. These wailed as they passed by. The smoke of the burnt powder had been carried away by a gentle wind, and in its place was the pervasive perfume

of the peach and cherry trees, and the aroma of the gugan wood which was like cut sandal in the sun after a rain. In the homes of a few rich folk there was feasting also, for it mattered little to them whether Boonda Broke or Pango Dooni ruled in Mandakan, so that their wealth was left to them. But hundreds of tinkling little bells broke the stillness. These were carried by brown bare-footed boys, who ran lightly up and down the streets, calling softly: "Corn and tears and wine for the dead!" It was the custom for mourners to place in the hands of the dead a bottle of tears and wine, and a seed of corn, as it is written in the Proverbs of Dol:

"When thou journeyest into the Shadows, take not sweetmeats with thee, but a seed of corn and a bottle of tears and wine; that thou mayest have a garden in the land whither thou goest."

It was yet hardly night when the pyres were lighted on the little hills and a warm glow was thrown over all the city, made warmer by roseate-hued homes and the ruddy stones and velvety dust of the streets. At midnight the Dakoon was to be brought to the Tomb with the Blue Dome. Now in the Palace yard his body lay under a canopy, the flags of Mandakan and England over his breast, twenty of his own naked body-guard stood round, and four of his high chiefs stood at his head and four at his feet, and little lads ran softly past, crying: *"Corn and tears and wine for the dead!"* And behind all these again were placed the dark battalions and the hillsmen. It went abroad through the city that Pango Dooni and Cumner paid great homage to the dead Dakoon, and the dread of the hillsmen grew less.

But in one house there had been no fear, for there, by the Aqueduct of the Failing Fountain, lived Cushnan

Di, a fallen chief, and his daughter with the body like a trailing vine; for one knew the sorrow of dispossession and defeat and the arm of a leader of men, and the other knew Tang-a-Dahit and the soul that was in him.

This night, while yet there was an hour before the body of the dead Dakoon should go to the Tomb with the Blue Dome, the daughter of Cushnan Di lay watching for her door to open; for she knew what had happened in the city, and there was one whom her spirit longed for. An old woman sat beside her with hands clasped about her knees.

"Dost thou hear nothing?" said a voice from the bed.

"Nothing but the stir of the mandrake trees, beloved."

"Nay, but dost thou not hear a step?"

"Naught, child of the heaven-flowers, but a dog's foot in the moss."

"Thou art sure that my father is safe?"

"The Prince is safe, angel of the high clouds. He led the hillsmen by the secret way into the Palace yard."

There was silence for a moment, and then the girl's voice said again: "Hush! but there was a footstep—I heard a breaking twig."

Her face lighted, and the head slightly turned towards the door. But the body did not stir. It lay moveless, save where the bosom rose and fell softly, quivering under the white robe. A great wolf-dog raised its head at the foot of the bed and pointed its ears, looking towards the door.

The face of the girl was beautiful. A noble peace was upon it, and the eyes were like lamps of dusky fire, as though they held all the strength of the nerveless body. The love burning in them was not the love

of a maid for a man, but that which comes after, through pain and trouble and wisdom. It was the look that lasts after death, the look shot forward from the Hereafter upon a living face which has looked into the great mystery, but has not passed behind the curtains.

There was a knock upon the door, and, in response to a summons, Tang-a-Dahit stepped inside. A beautiful smile settled upon the girl's face, and her eyes brooded tenderly upon the young hillsman.

"I am here, Mami," said he.

"Friend of my heart," she answered. "It is so long!"

Then he told her how, through Cumner's Son, he had been turned from his visit two days before, and of the journey down, and of the fighting, and of all that had chanced.

She smiled, and assented with her eyes—her father had told her. "My father knows that thou dost come to me, and he is not angry," she said.

Then she asked him what was to be the end of all, and he shook his head. "The young are not taken into counsel," he answered, "neither I nor Cumner's Son."

All at once her eyes brightened as though a current of light had been suddenly sent through them.

"Cumner's Son," said she—"Cumner's Son, and thou—the future of Mandakan is all with ye; neither with Cumner, nor with Pango Dooni, nor with Cushnan Di. To the old is given counsel, and device, and wisdom, and holding; but to the young is given hope, and vision, and action, and building, and peace."

"Cumner's Son is without," said he. "May I fetch him to thee?"

She looked grave, and shrank a little, then answered yes.

"So strong, so brave, so young!" she said, almost under her breath, as the young man entered.

Cumner's Son stood abashed at first to see this angelic head, so full of light and life, like nothing he had ever seen, and the nerveless, moveless body, like a flower with no roots.

"Thou art brave," said she, "and thy heart is without fear, for thou hast no evil in thee. Great things shall come to thee, and to thee," she added, turning to Tang-a-Dahit, "but by different ways."

Tang-a-Dahit looked at her as one would look at the face of a saint; and his fingers, tired yet with the swinging of the sword, stroked the white coverlet of her couch gently and abstractedly. Once or twice Cumner's Son tried to speak, but failed, and at last all he could say was: "Thou art good—thou art good!" and then he turned and stole quietly from the room.

At midnight they carried the Dakoon to the resting-place of his fathers. A thousand torches gleamed from the Palace gates through the Street of Divers Pities, and along the Path by the Bazaar to the Tomb with the Blue Dome. A hundred hillsmen rode before, and a hundred behind, and between were two thousand soldiers of Mandakan on foot and fifty of the late Dakoon's body-guard mounted and brilliant in scarlet and gold. Behind the gun-carriage, which bore the body, walked the nephew of the great Dakoon, then came a clear space, and then Pango Dooni, and Cumner, and behind these twenty men of the artillery, at whose head rode McDermot and Cumner's Son.

As they passed the Path by the Bazaar every eye among the hillsmen and among the handful of British was alert. Suddenly a savage murmuring among the

natives in the Bazaar broke into a loud snarl, and it seemed as if a storm was about to break; but as suddenly, at a call from Cumner, the hillsmen, the British, and a thousand native soldiers, faced the Bazaar in perfect silence, their lances, swords, and rifles in a pose of menace. The whole procession stood still for a moment. In the pause the crowds in the Bazaar drew back, then came a loud voice calling on them to rescue the dead Dakoon from murderers and infidels; and a wave of dark bodies moved forward, but suddenly cowered before the malicious stillness of the hillsmen and the British, and the wave retreated.

Cumner's Son had recognised the voice, and his eye followed its direction with a perfect certainty. Even as he saw the figure of Boonda Broke disguised as a native soldier the half-breed's arm was raised, and a kris flew from his hands, aimed at the heart of Pango Dooni. But as the kris flew the youth spurred his horse out of the ranks and down upon the murderer, who sprang back into the Bazaar. The lad fearlessly rode straight into the Bazaar, and galloped down upon the fugitive, who suddenly swung round to meet him with naked kris; but, as he did so, a dog ran across his path, tripped him up, and he half fell. Before he could recover himself a pistol was at his head.

"March!" said the lad; and even as ten men of the artillery rode through the crowd to rescue their Colonel's son, he marched the murderer on. But a sudden frenzy possessed Boonda Broke. He turned like lightning on the lad, and raised his kris to throw; but a bullet was quicker, and he leaped into the air and fell dead without a cry, the kris dropping from his hand.

As Cumner's Son came forth into the path the hills-

men and artillery cheered him, the native troops took it up, and it was answered by the people in all the thoroughfare.

Pango Dooni had also seen the kris thrown at himself, but he could not escape it, though he half swung round. It struck him in the shoulder, and quivered where it struck, but he drew it out and threw it down. A hillsman bound up the wound, and he rode on to the Tomb.

The Dakoon was placed in his gorgeous house of death, and every man cried: "Sleep, lord of the earth!" Then Cumner stood up in his saddle, and cried aloud:

"To-morrow, when the sun stands over the gold dome of the Palace, ye shall come to hear your Dakoon speak in the hall of the Heavenly Hours."

No man knew from Cumner's speech who was to be Dakoon, yet every man in Mandakan said in the quiet of his home that night:

"To-morrow Pango Dooni will be Dakoon. We will be as the stubble of the field before him. But Pango Dooni is a strong man."

VII

THE RED PLAGUE

"He promised he'd bring me a basket of posies,
A garland of lilies, a garland of roses,
A little straw hat to set off the blue ribbons
That tie up my bonnie brown hair."

This was the song McDermot sang to himself as he walked up the great court-yard of the Palace, past the lattice windows, behind which the silent women of the late Dakoon's household still sat, passive and grief-

stricken. How knew they what the new Dakoon would do—send them off into the hills, or kill them?

McDermot was in a famous humour, for he had just come from Pango Dooni, the possessor of a great secret, and he had been paid high honour. He looked round on the court-yard complacently, and with an air of familiarity and possession which seemed hardly justified by his position. He noted how the lattices stirred as he passed through this inner court-yard where few strangers were ever allowed to pass, and he cocked his head vaingloriously. He smiled at the lizards hanging on the foundation stones, he paused to dip his finger in the basin of a fountain, he eyed good-humouredly the beggars—old pensioners of the late Dakoon—seated in the shade with outstretched hands. One of them drew his attention, a slim, cadaverous-looking wretch who still was superior to his fellows, and who sat apart from them, evidently by their wish as much as by his own.

McDermot was still humming the song to himself as he neared the group; but he stopped short, as he heard the isolated beggar repeat after him in English:

> "He promised he'd bring me a bunch of blue ribbons,
> To tie up my bonnie brown hair."

He was startled. At first he thought it might be an Englishman in disguise, but the brown of the beggar's face was real, and there was no mistaking the high narrow forehead, the slim fingers, and the sloe-black eyes. Yet he seemed not a native of Mandakan. McDermot was about to ask him who he was, when there was a rattle of horse's hoofs, and Cumner's Son galloped excitedly up the court-yard.

"Captain, captain," said he, "the Red Plague is on the city!"

McDermot staggered back in consternation. "No, no," cried he, "it is not so, sir!"

"The man, the first, lies at the entrance of the Path by the Bazaar. No one will pass near him, and all the city goes mad with fear. What's to be done? What's to be done? Is there no help for it?" the lad cried in despair. "I'm going to Pango Dooni. Where is he? In the Palace?"

McDermot shook his head mournfully, for he knew the history of this plague, the horror of its ravages, the tribes it had destroyed.

The beggar leaned back against the cool wall and laughed. McDermot turned on him in his fury, and would have kicked him, but Cumner's Son, struck by some astute intelligence in the man's look, said:

"What do you know of the Red Plague?"

Again the beggar laughed. "Once I saved the city of Nangoon from the plague, but they forgot me, and when I complained and in my anger went mad at the door of the Palace, the Rajah drove me from the country. That was in India, where I learned to speak English; and here am I at the door of a Palace again!"

"Can you save the city from the plague?" asked Cumner's Son, coming closer and eagerly questioning.

"Is the man dead?" asked the beggar.

"Not when I saw him—he had just been taken."

"Good. The city may be saved if—" he looked at Cumner's Son, "if thou wilt save him with me. If he be healed there is no danger; it is the odour of death from the Red Plague which carries death abroad."

"Why do you ask this?" asked McDermot, nodding towards Cumner's Son.

The beggar shrugged his shoulders. "That he may not do with me as did the Rajah of Nangoon."

"He is not Dakoon," said McDermot.

"Will the young man promise me?"

"Promise what?" asked Cumner's Son.

"A mat to pray on, a house, a servant, and a loaf of bread, a bowl of goat's milk, and a silver majil every day till I die."

"I am not Dakoon," said the lad, "but I promise for the Dakoon—he will do this thing to save the city."

"And if thou shouldst break thy promise?"

"I keep my promises," said the lad stoutly.

"But if not, wilt thou give thy life to redeem it?"

"Yes."

The beggar laughed again and rose. "Come," said he.

"Don't go—it's absurd!" said McDermot, laying a hand on the young man's arm. "The plague cannot be cured."

"Yes, I will go," answered Cumner's Son. "I believe he speaks the truth. Go you to Pango Dooni and tell him all."

He spurred his horse and trotted away, the beggar running beside him. They passed out of the court-yard, and through the Gate by the Fountain of Sweet Waters.

They had not gone far when they saw Cumner, the Governor, and six men of the artillery riding towards them. The Governor stopped, and asked him where he was going.

The young man told him all.

The Colonel turned pale. "You would do this thing!" said he dumfounded. "Suppose this rascal," nodding towards the beggar, "speaks the truth; and suppose that, after all, the sick man should die and—"

"Then the lad and myself would be the first to follow

him," interrupted the beggar, "and all the multitude would come after, from the babe on the mat to the old man by the Palace gates. But if the sick man lives—"

The Governor looked at his son partly in admiration, partly in pain, and maybe a little of anger.

"Is there no one else? I tell you I—"

"There is no one else; the lad or death for the city! I can believe the young; the old have deceived me," interposed the beggar again.

"Time passes," said Cumner's Son anxiously. "The man may die. You say yes to my going, sir?" he asked his father.

The Governor frowned, and the skin of his cheeks tightened.

"Go—go, and good luck to you, boy." He made as if to ride on, but stopped short, flung out his hand, and grasped the hand of his son. "God be with you, lad," said he; then his jaws closed tightly, and he rode on.

It was easier for the lad than for him.

When he told the story to Pango Dooni the chief was silent for a moment; then he said:

"Until we know whether it be death or life, whether Cumner's Son save the city or lose his life for its sake, we will not call the people together in the Hall of the Heavenly Hours. I will send the heralds abroad, if it be thy pleasure, Cumner."

At noon—the hour when the people had been bidden to cry, "Live, Prince of the Everlasting Glory!"—they were moving restlessly, fearfully through the Bazaar and the highways, and watching from a distance a little white house, with blue curtains, where lay the man who was sick with the Red Plague, and where watched beside his bed Cumner's Son and the beggar of Nangoon. No one came near.

From the time the sick man had been brought into the house, the beggar had worked with him, giving him tinctures which he boiled with sweetmeat called the Flower of Bambaba, while Cumner's Son rubbed an ointment into his body. Now and again the young man went to the window and looked out at the lines of people hundreds of yards away, and the empty spaces where the only life that showed was a gay-plumaged bird that drifted across the sunlight, or a monkey that sat in the dust eating a nut. All at once the awe and danger of his position fell upon him. Imagination grew high in him in a moment—that beginning of fear and sorrow and heart-burning; yet, too, the beginning of hope and wisdom and achievement. For the first time in his life that knowledge overcame him which masters us all sometimes. He had a desire to fly the place; he felt like running from the house, shrieking as he went. A sweat broke out on his forehead, his lips clung to his teeth, his mouth was dry, his breast seemed to contract, and breathing hurt him.

"What a fool I was! What a fool I was to come here!" he said.

He buried his head in his arms as he leaned against the wall, and his legs trembled. From that moment he passed from headlong, daring, lovable youth, to manhood; understanding, fearful, conscientious, and morally strong. Just as abject as was his sudden fear, so triumphant was his reassertion of himself.

"It was the only way," he said to himself, suddenly wresting his head from his protecting arms. "There's a chance of life, anyhow, chance for all of us." He turned away to the sick man's bed, to see the beggar watching him with cold, passive eyes and a curious, half-sneering smile. He braced himself and met the

passive, scrutinising looks firmly. The beggar said nothing, but motioned to him to lift the sick man upright, while he poured some tincture down his throat, and bound the head and neck about with saturated linen.

There came a knocking at the door. The beggar frowned, but Cumner's Son turned eagerly. He had only been in this room ten hours, but it seemed like years in which he had lived alone—alone. But he met firmly the passive, inquisitorial eyes of the healer of the plague, and he turned, dropped another bar across the door, and bade the intruder to depart.

"It is I, Tang-a-Dahit. Open!" came a loud, anxious voice.

"You may not come in."

"I am thy brother-in-blood, and my life is thine."

"Then keep it safe for those who prize it. Go back to the Palace."

"I am not needed there. My place is with thee."

"Go, then, to the little house by the Aqueduct."

There was silence for a moment, and then Tang-a-Dahit said:

"Wilt thou not let me enter?"

The sudden wailing of the stricken man drowned Tang-a-Dahit's words, and without a word Cumner's Son turned again to the victim of the Red Plague.

All day the people watched from afar, and all day long soldiers and hillsmen drew a wide cordon of quarantine round the house. Terror seized the people when the sun went down, and to the watchers the suspense grew. Ceaseless, alert, silent, they had watched and waited, and at last the beggar knelt with his eyes fixed on the sleeper, and did not stir. A little way off from him stood Cumner's Son—patient, pale, worn, older by ten years than he was three days before.

In the city dismay and misery ruled. Boonda Broke and the dead Dakoon were forgotten. The people were in the presence of a monster which could sweep them from their homes as a hail-storm scatters the hanging nests of wild bees. In a thousand homes little red lights of propitiation were shining, and the sweet boolda wood was burning at a thousand shrines. Midnight came, then the long lethargic hours after; then that moment when all cattle of the field and beasts of the forest wake and stand upon their feet, and lie down again, and the cocks crow, and the birds flutter their wings, and all resign themselves to sleep once more. It was in this hour that the sick man opened his eyes and raised his head, as though the mysterious influence of primitive life were rousing him. He said nothing and did nothing, but lay back and drew in a long, good breath of air, and afterwards fell asleep.

The beggar got to his feet. "The man is safe," said he.

"I will go and tell them," said Cumner's Son gladly, and he made as if to open the door.

"Not till dawn," commanded the beggar. "Let them suffer for their sins. We hold the knowledge of life and death in our hands."

"But my father, and Tang-a-Dahit, and Pango Dooni."

"Are they without sin?" asked the beggar scornfully. "At dawn, only at dawn!"

So they sat and waited till dawn. And when the sun was well risen, the beggar threw wide open the door of the house, and called aloud to the horsemen far off, and Cumner's Son waved with his hand; and McDermot came galloping to them. He jumped from his horse and wrung the boy's hand, then that of the

beggar, then talked in broken sentences, which were spattered by the tears in his throat. He told Cumner's Son that his face was as that of one who had lain in a grave, and he called aloud in a blustering voice, and beckoned for troopers to come. The whole line moved down on them, horsemen and soldiers and people.

The city was saved from the Red Plague, and the people, gone mad with joy, would have carried Cumner's Son to the Palace on their shoulders, but he walked beside the beggar to his father's house, hillsmen in front and English soldiers behind; and wasted and ghostly, from riding and fighting and watching, he threw himself upon the bed in his own room, and passed, as an eyelid blinks, into a deep sleep.

But the beggar sat down on a mat with a loaf of bread, a bowl of goat's milk, and a long cigar which McDermot gave him, and he received idly all who came, even to the sick man, who ere the day was done was brought to the Residency, and, out of danger and in his right mind, lay in the shade of a banyan tree, thinking of nothing save the joy of living.

VIII

THE CHOOSING OF THE DAKOON

It was noon again. In the Hall of the Heavenly Hours all the chiefs and great people of the land were gathered, and in the Palace yard without were thousands of the people of the Bazaars and the one-storied houses. The Bazaars were almost empty, the streets deserted. Yet silken banners of gorgeous colours flew above the pink terraces, and the call of the silver horn of Mandakan, which was made first when Tubal Cain

was young, rang through the long vacant avenues. A few hundred native troops and a handful of hillsmen rode up and down, and at the Residency fifty men kept guard under command of Sergeant Doolan of the artillery—his superior officers and the rest of his comrades were at the Palace.

In the shade of a banyan tree sat the recovered victim of the Red Plague and the beggar of Nangoon, playing a game of chuck-farthing, taught them by Sergeant Doolan, a bowl of milk and a calabash of rice beside them, and cigarettes in their mouths. The beggar had a new turban and robe, and he sat on a mat which came from the Palace.

He had gone to the Palace that morning as Colonel Cumner had commanded, that he might receive the thanks of the Dakoon for the people of Mandakan; but he had tired of the great place, and had come back to play at chuck-farthing. Already he had won everything the other possessed, and was now playing for his dinner. He was still chuckling over his victory when an orderly and two troopers arrived with a riderless horse, bearing the command of Colonel Cumner for the beggar to appear at once at the Palace. The beggar looked doubtfully at the orderly a moment, then rose with an air of lassitude and languidly mounted the horse. Before he had got half-way to the Palace he suddenly slid from the horse and said:

"Why should I go? The son of the great Cumner promised for the Dakoon. He tells the truth. Light of my soul, but truth is the greatest of all! I go to play chuck-farthing."

So saying, he turned and ran lazily back to the Residency and sat down beneath the banyan tree. The orderly had no commands to bring him by force,

so he returned to the Palace, and entered it as the English Governor was ending his speech to the people.

"We were in danger," said Cumner, "and the exalted chief, Pango Dooni, came to save us. He shielded us from evil and death and the dagger of the mongrel chief, Boonda Broke. Children of heavenly Mandakan, Pango Dooni has lived at variance with us, but now he is our friend. A strong man should rule in the Palace of Mandakan as my brother and the friend of my people. I speak for Pango Dooni. For whom do you speak?"

As he had said, so said all the people in the Hall of the Heavenly Hours, and it was taken up with shouts by the people in the Palace yard. Pango Dooni should be Dakoon!

Pango Dooni came forward and said: "If as ye say I have saved ye, then will ye do after my desire, if it be right. I am too long at variance with this Palace to sit comfortably here. Sometime, out of my bitter memories, I should smite ye. Nay, let the young, who have no wrongs to satisfy, let the young who have dreams and visions and hopes, rule; not the old lion of the hills, who loves too well himself and his rugged ease of body and soul. But if ye owe me any debt, and if ye mean me thanks, then will ye make my son Dakoon. For he is braver than I, and between ye there is no feud. Then will I be your friend, and because my son shall be Dakoon I will harry ye no more, but bide in my hills, free and friendly, and ready with sword and lance to stand by the faith and fealty that I promise. If this be your will, and the will of the great Cumner, speak."

Cumner bowed his head in assent, and the people called in a loud voice for Tang-a-Dahit.

The young man stepped forth, and baring his head, said:

"It is meet that the race be to the swift, to those who have proven their faith and their swords; who have the gift for ruling, and the talent of the sword to sustain it. For me, if ye will hear me, I will go another way. I will not rule. My father hath passed on this honour to me, but I yield it up to one who hath saved ye from a double death, even to the great Cumner's Son. He rode, as ye know, through peril to Pango Dooni, bearing the call for help, and he hath helped to save the whole land from the Red Plague. But for him Mandakan would be only a place of graves. Speak, children of heavenly Mandakan, whom will ye choose?"

When Cumner's Son stood forth he was pale and astounded before the cries of greeting that were carried out through the Palace yard, through the highways, and even to the banyan tree where sat the beggar of Nangoon.

"I have done nothing, I have done nothing," said he sincerely. "It was Pango Dooni, it was the beggar of Nangoon. I am not fit to rule."

He turned to his father, but saw no help in his eyes for refusal. The lad read the whole story of his father's face, and he turned again to the people.

"If ye will have it so, then, by the grace of God, I will do right by this our land," said he.

A half-hour later he stood before them, wearing the costly robe of yellow feathers and gold and perfect silk of the Dakoon of Mandakan.

"The beggar of Nangoon who saved our city, bid him come near," he said; but the orderly stepped forward and told his story of how the beggar had returned to his banyan tree.

"Then tell the beggar of Nangoon," said he, "that if he will not visit me, I will visit him; and all that I promised for the Dakoon of Mandakan I will fulfil. Let Cushnan Di stand forth," he added, and the old man came near. "The city which was yours is yours again, and all that was taken from it shall be restored," said he.

Then he called him by his real name, and the people were amazed.

Cushnan Di, as he had been known to them, said quietly:

"If my Lord will give me place near him as general of his armies and keeper of the gates, I will not ask that my city be restored, and I will live near to the Palace—"

"Nay, but *in* the Palace," interrupted Cumner's Son, "and thy daughter also, who hath the wisdom of heaven, that there be always truth shining in these high places."

An hour later the Dakoon passed through the Path by the Bazaar.

"Whither goes the Dakoon?" asked a native chief of McDermot.

"To visit a dirty beggar in the Residency Square, and afterwards to the little house of Cushnan Di," was the reply.

IX

THE PROPHET OF PEACE

THE years went by.

In the cool of a summer evening a long procession of people passed through the avenues of blossoming peach and cherry trees in Mandakan, singing a high chant or

song. It was sacred, yet it was not solemn; peaceful, yet not sombre; rather gentle, aspiring, and clear. The people were not of the city alone, but they had been gathered from all parts of the land—many thousands, who were now come on a pilgrimage to Mandakan.

At the head of the procession was a tall, lithe figure, whose face shone, and whose look was at once that of authority and love. Three years' labour had given him these followers and many others. His dreams were coming true.

"*Fighting, fighting, naught but fighting for honour and glory and homes and kine, but naught for love, and naught that there may be peace.*"—This was no longer true; for the sword of the young Dakoon was ever lifted for love and for peace.

The great procession stopped near a little house by the Aqueduct of the Failing Fountain, and spread round it, and the leader stepped forward to the door of the little house and entered. A silence fell upon the crowd, for they were to look upon the face of a dying girl, who chose to dwell in her little home rather than in a palace.

She was carried forth on a litter, and set down, and the long procession passed by her as she lay. She smiled at all an ineffable smile of peace, and her eyes had in them the light of a good day drawing to its close. Only once did she speak, and that was when all had passed, and a fine troop of horsemen came riding up.

This was the Dakoon of Mandakan and his retinue. When he dismounted and came to her, and bent over her, he said something in a low tone for her ear alone, and she smiled at him, and whispered the one word: "Peace!"

Then the Dakoon, who once was known only as Cumner's Son, turned and embraced the prophet Sandoni,

as he was now called, though once he had been called Tang-a-Dahit the hillsman.

"What message shall I bear thy father?" asked the Dakoon, after they had talked a while.

Sandoni told him, and then the Dakoon said:

"Thy father and mine, who are gone to settle a wild tribe of the hills in a peaceful city, send thee a message."

And he held up his arm, where a bracelet shone.

The Prophet read thereon the Sacred Countersign of the hillsmen.

THE HIGH COURT OF BUDGERY-GAR

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We were camped on the edge of a billabong. Barlas was kneading a damper, Drysdale was tenderly packing coals about the billy to make the water boil, and I was cooking the chops. The hobbled horses were picking the grass and the old-man salt-bush near, and Bimbi, the black boy, was gathering twigs and bark for the fire. That is the order of merit—Barlas, Drysdale, myself, the horses and Bimbi. Then comes the Cadi all by himself. He is given an isolated and indolent position, because he was our guest and also because, in a way, he represented the Government. And though bushmen do not believe much in a far-off Government—even though they say when protesting against a bad Land Law, "And your Petitioners will ever Pray," and all that kind of yabber-yabber—they give its representative the lazy side of the fire and a fig of the best tobacco when he bails up a camp as the Cadi did ours. Stewart Ruttan, the Cadi, was the new magistrate at Windowie and Gilgan, which stand for a huge section of the Carpentaria country. He was now on his way to Gilgan to try some cases there. He was a new chum, though he had lived in Australia for years. As Barlas said, he'd been kept in a cultivation-paddock in Sydney and Brisbane; and he was now going to take the business of justice out of the hands of Heaven and its trusted agents the bushmen, and reduce the land to the peace of the Beatitudes by the imposing reign of law and summary judgments. Barlas had just said as much, though in different language.

I knew by the way that Barlas dropped the damper on the hot ashes and swung round on his heel that he was in a bad temper. "And so you think, Cadi," said he, "that we squatters and bushmen are a strong, murderous lot; that we hunt down the Myalls* like kangaroos or dingoes, and unrighteously take justice in our own hands instead of handing it over to you?"

"I think," said the Cadi, "that individual and private revenge should not take the place of the Courts of Law. If the blacks commit depredations—"

"Depredations!" interjected Drysdale with sharp scorn.

"If they commit depredations and crimes," the Cadi continued, "they should be captured as criminals are captured elsewhere and be brought in and tried. In that way respect would be shown to British law and—" —here he hesitated slightly, for Barlas's face was not pleasant to see—"and the statutes."

But Barlas's voice was almost compassionate as he said: "Cadi, every man to his trade, and you've got yours. But you haven't learned yet that this isn't Brisbane or Melbourne. You haven't stopped to consider how many police would be necessary for this immense area of country if you are really to be of any use. And see here,"—his face grew grim and dark,—"you don't know what it is to wait for the law to set things right in this Never Never Land. There isn't a man in the Carpentaria and Port Darwin country but has lost a friend by the cowardly crack of a waddy in the dead of night or a spear from behind a tree. Never any fair fighting, but red slaughter and murder—curse their black hearts!" Barlas gulped down what seemed very like a sob.

* Aborigines.

Drysdale and I knew how strongly Barlas felt. He had been engaged to be married to a girl on the Daly River, and a week before the wedding she and her mother and her two brothers were butchered by blacks whom they had often befriended and fed. We knew what had turned Barlas's hair grey and spoiled his life.

Drysdale took up the strain: "Yes, Cadi, you've got the true missionary gospel, the kind of yabber they fire at each other over tea and buns at Darling Point and Toorak—all about the poor native and the bad, bad men who don't put peas in their guns, and do sometimes get an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. . . . Come here, Bimbi." Bimbi came.

"Yes, master," Bimbi said.

"You kill that black-fellow mother belonging to you?"

"Yes, master."

"Yes," Drysdale continued, "Bimbi went out with a police expedition against his own tribe, and himself cut his own mother's head off. As a race, as a family, the blacks have no loyalty. They will track their own brothers down for the whites as ruthlessly as they track down the whites. As a race they are treacherous and vile, though as individuals they may have good points."

"No, Cadi," once more added Barlas, "we can get along very well without your consolidated statutes or High Courts or Low Courts just yet. They are too slow. Leave the black devils to us. You can never prove anything against them in a court of law. We've tried that. Tribal punishment is the only proper thing for individual crime. That is what the nations practise in the islands of the South Seas. A trader or a Government official is killed. Then a man-of-war

sweeps a native village out of existence with Hotchkiss guns. Cadi, we like you; but we say to you, Go back to your cultivation-paddock at Brisbane, and marry a wife and beget children before the Lord, and feed on the Government, and let us work out our own salvation. We'll preserve British justice and the statutes, too. . . . There, the damper, as Bimbi would say, is *corbon budgery*, and your chop is done to a turn, Cadi. And now let's talk of something that doesn't leave a bad taste in the mouth."

The Cadi undoubtedly was more at home with reminiscences of nights at the Queensland Club and moonlight picnics at lovely Humpy Bong and champagne spreads in a Government launch than at dispensing law in the Carpentaria district. And he had eager listeners. Drysdale's open-mouthed, admiring "My word!" as he puffed his pipe, his back against an ironbark tree, was most eloquent of long banishment from the delights of the "cultivation-paddock"; and Barlas nodded frequently his approval, and was less grim than usual. Yet, peaceful as we were, it might have puzzled a stranger to see that all of us were armed—armed in this tenantless, lonely wilderness! Lonely and tenantless enough it seemed. There was the range of the Copper-mine hills to the south, lighted by the wan moon; and between and to the west a rough scrub country, desolating beyond words, and where even edible snakes would be scarce; spots of dead-finish, gidya, and brigalow-bush to north and east, and in the trees by the billabong the cry of the cockatoo and the laughing-jackass. It was lonely, but surely it was safe. Yes, perhaps it was safe!

It was late when we turned in, our heads upon our saddles, for the Cadi had been more than amusing—

he had been confidential, and some political characters were roughly overhauled for our benefit, while so-called Society did not escape flagellation. Next morning the Cadi left us. He gave us his camps—Bora Bora, Budgery-Gar, Wintelliga, and Gilgan—since we were to go in his direction also soon. He turned round in his saddle as he rode off, and said gaily: "Gentlemen, I hope you'll always help to uphold the majesty of the law as nobly as you have sustained its envoy from your swags."

Drysdale and I waved our hands to him, but Barlas muttered something between his teeth. We had two days of cattle-hunting in the Copper-mine hills, and then we started westward, in the tracks of the Cadi, to make for Barlas's station. The second day we camped at Bora Bora Creek. We had just hobbled the horses, and were about to build a fire, when Bimbi came running to us. "Master, master," he said to Drysdale, "that fellow Cadi yarraman mumkull over there. Plenty myall mandowie!"—("Master, master, the Cadi's horse is dead over there, and there are plenty of black fellows' tracks about.")

We found the horse pierced with spears. The Cadi had evidently mounted and tried to get away. And soon, by a clump of the stay-a-while bush, we discovered, alas! the late companion of our camp-fire. He was gashed from head to foot, and naked.

We buried him beneath a rustling sandal-tree, and on its bark carved the words:

"Sacred to the memory of Stewart Ruttan."

And beneath, Barlas added the following:

"The Cadi sleeps. The Law regards him not."

In a pocket of the Cadi's coat, which lay near, we found the picture of a pretty girl. On it was written:

"To dearest Stewart, from Alice."

Barlas's face was stern and drawn. He looked at us from under his shaggy brows.

"There's a Court to be opened," he said. "Do you stand for law or justice?"

"For justice," we replied.

Four days later in a ravine at Budgery-Gar a big camp of blacks were feasting. With loathsome pantomime they were re-enacting the murders they had committed within the past few days; murders of innocent white women and children, and good men and true—among them the Cadi, God help him! Great fires were burning in the centre of the camp, and the bodies of the black devils writhed with hideous colour in the glare. Effigies of murdered whites were speared and mangled with brutal cries, and then black women of the camp were brought out, and mockeries of unnameable horrors were performed. Hell had emptied forth its carrion.

But twelve bitter white men looked down upon this scene from the scrub and rocks above, and their teeth were set. Barlas, their leader, turned to them and said:

"This court is open. Are you ready?"

The click of twelve rifles was the reply.

When these twelve white jurymen rode away from the ravine there was not one but believed that justice had been done by the High Court of Budgery-Gar.

AN EPIC IN YELLOW

AN EPIC IN YELLOW

THERE was a culminating growth of irritation on board the *Merrie Monarch*. The Captain was markedly fitful and, to a layman's eye, unreliable at the helm; the Hon. Skye Terryer was smoking violently, and the Newspaper Correspondent—representing an American syndicate—chewed his cigar in silence.

"Yes," Gregson, the Member of Parliament, continued, "if I had my way I'd muster every mob of Chinamen in Australia, I'd have one thundering big round-up, and into the Pacific and the Indian Sea they'd go, to the crack of a stock-whip or of something more convincing." The Hon. Skye Terryer was in agreement with the Squatting Member in the principle of his argument if not in the violence of his remedies. He was a young travelling Englishman; one of that class who are Radicals at twenty, Independents at thirty, and Conservatives at forty. He had not yet reached the intermediate stage. He saw in this madcap Radical Member one of the crude but strong expressions of advanced civilisation. He had the noble ideal of Australia as a land trodden only by the Caucasian. The Correspondent, much to our surprise, had by occasional interjections at the beginning of the discussion showed that he was not antipathetic to Mongolian immigration. The Captain?

"Yes, I'd give 'em Botany Bay, my word!" added the Member as an anti-climax.

The Captain let go the helm with a suddenness which took our breath away, apparently regardless

that we were going straight as an arrow on the Island of Pentecost, the shore of which, in its topaz and emerald tints, was pretty enough to look at but not to attack, end on. He pushed both hands down deep into his pockets and squared himself for war.

"Gregson," he said, "that kind of talk may be good enough for Parliament and for labour meetings, but it is not proper diet for the *Merrie Monarch*. It's a kind of political gospel that's no better than the creed of the Malay who runs amuck. God's Providence—where would your Port Darwin Country have been without the Chinaman? What would have come to tropical agriculture in North Queensland if it had not been for the same? And what would all your cities do for vegetables to eat and clean shirts to their backs if it was not for the Chinkie? As for their morals, look at the police records of any well-regulated city where they are—well-regulated, mind you, not like San Francisco! I pity the morals of a man and the stupidity of him and the benightedness of him that would drive the Chinaman out at the point of the bayonet or by the crack of a rifle. I pity that man, and—and I wash my hands of him."

And having said all this with a strong Scotch accent the Captain opportunely turned to his duty and prevented us from trying conclusions with the walls of a precipice, over which fell silver streams of water like giant ropes up which the Naiads might climb to the balmy enclosures where the Dryads dwelt. The beauty of the scene was but a mechanical impression, to be remembered afterward when thousands of miles away, for the American Correspondent now at last lit his cigar and took up the strain.

"Say, the Captain's right," he said. "You English

are awful prigs and hypocrites, politically; as selfish a lot as you'll find on the face of the globe. But in this matter of the Chinaman there isn't any difference between a man from Oregon and one from Sydney, only the Oregonian isn't a prig and a hypocrite; he's only a brute, a bragging, hard-handed brute. He got the Chinaman to build his railways—he couldn't get any other race to do it—same fix as the planter in North Queensland with the Polynesian; and to serve him in pioneer times and open up the country, and when that was done he turns round and says: 'Out you go, you Chinkie—out you go and out you stay! We're going to reap this harvest all alone; we're going to Chicago you clean off the table!' And Washington, the Home of Freedom and Tammany Tigers, shoves a prohibitive Bill through the Legislature, as Parkes did in Sydney; only Parkes talked a lot of Sunday-school business about the solidarity of the British race, and Australia for the Australians, and all that patter; and the Oregonian showed his dirty palm of selfishness straight out, and didn't blush either. 'Give 'em Botany Bay! Give 'em the stock-whip and the rifle!' That's a nice gospel for the Anglo-Saxon dispensation."

The suddenness of the attack overwhelmed the Member, but he was choking with wrath. Had he not stone-walled in the New South Wales Parliament for nine hours, and been placed on a Royal Commission for that service? "My word!" But the box of cigars was here amiably passed, and what seemed like a series of international complications was stayed. It was perhaps fortunate, however, that at this moment a new interest sprang up. We were rounding a lofty headland crowned with groves of cocoa-palms and bananas and with trailing skirts of flowers and vines, when we saw

ahead of us a pretty little bay, and on the shore a human being plainly not a Polynesian. Up the hillside that rose suddenly from the beach was a thatched dwelling, not built open all round like most native houses, and apparently having but one doorway. In front of the house, and near it, was a tall staff, and on the staff the British Flag.

In a moment we, too, had the British Flag flying at our mast-head.

Long ago I ceased to wonder at coincidences, still I confess I was scarcely prepared for the Correspondent's exclamation, as, taking the marine glass from his eyes, he said: "Well, I'm decalogued if it ain't a Chinaman!"

It certainly was so. Here on the Island of Pentecost, in the New Hebrides, was a Celestial washing clothes on the beach as much at home as though he were in Tacoma or Cooktown. The Member's "My oath!" Skye Terryer's "Ah!" and the Captain's chuckle were as weighty with importance as though the whole question of Chinese immigration were now to be settled. As we hove-to and dropped anchor, a boat was pushed out into the surf by a man who had hurriedly come down the beach from the house. In a moment or two he was alongside. An English face and an English voice greeted us, and in the doorway of the house were an English woman and her child.

What pleasure this meeting gave to us and to the trader—for such he was, those only can know who have sailed these Southern Seas through long and nerveless tropic days, and have lived, as this man did with his wife and child, for months never seeing a white face, and ever in danger of an attack from cannibal tribes, who, when apparently most disposed to amity, are really planning a massacre. Yet with that instinct of gain

so strong in the Anglo-Saxon, this trader had dared the worst for the chance of making money quickly and plentifully by the sale of copra to occasional vessels. The Chinaman had come with the trader from Queensland, and we were assured was "as good as gold." If colour counted, he looked it. At this the pro-Mongolian magnanimously forbore to show any signs of triumph. The Correspondent, on the contrary, turned to the Chinaman and began chaffing him; he continued it as the others, save myself, passed on towards the house.

This was the close of the dialogue: "Well, John, how are you getting on?"

"Welly good," was John's reply; "thirletty dollars a month, and learn the plan of salvation."

The Correspondent laughed.

"Well, you good Englishman, John? You like British flag? You fight?"

And John, blinking jaundicely, replied: "John allee samee Linglishman—muchee fightee blimeby—nigger no eatee China boy;" and he chuckled.

A day and a night we lingered in the little Bay of Vivi, and then we left it behind; each of us, however, watching till we could see the house on the hillside and the flag no longer, and one at least wondering if that secret passage into the hills from the palm-thatched home would ever be used as the white dwellers fled for their lives.

We had promised that, if we came near Pentecost again on our cruise, we would spend another idle day in the pretty bay. Two months passed and then we kept our word. As we rounded the lofty headland the Correspondent said: "Say, I'm hankering after that baby!" But the Captain at the moment hoarsely cried: "God's love! but where are the house and the flag?"

There was no house and there was no flag above the Bay of Vivi.

Ten minutes afterwards we stood beside the flag-staff, and at our feet lay a moaning, mangled figure. It was the Chinaman, and over his gashed misery were drawn the folds of the flag that had flown on the staff. What horror we feared for those who were not to be seen needs no telling here.

As for the Chinaman, it was as he said; the cannibals would not "eatee Chinee boy." They were fastidious. They had left him, disdaining even to take his head for a trophy.

Hours after, on board the *Merrie Monarch*, we learned in fragments the sad story. It was John Chinaman that covered the retreat of the wife and child into the hills when the husband had fallen.

The last words that the dying Chinkie said were these: "Blitish flag wellee good thing keepee China boy walm; plentee good thing China boy sleepee in all a-time."

So it was. With rude rites and reverent hands, we lowered him to the deep from the decks of the *Merrie Monarch*, and round him was that flag under which he had fought for English woman and English child so valorously.

> "And he went like a warrior into his rest
> With the Union Jack around him."

That was the paraphrasing epitaph the Correspondent wrote for him in the pretty Bay of Vivi, and when he read it, we all drank in silence to the memory of "a Chinkie."

We found the mother and the child on the other side

of the island ere a week had passed, and bore them away in safety. They speak to-day of a member of a despised race, as one who showed

"The constant service of the antique world."

DIBBS, R.N.

"Now listen to me, Neddie Dibbs," she said, as she bounced the ball lightly on her tennis-racket, "you are very precipitate. It's only four weeks since you were court-martialed, and you escaped being reduced by the very closest shave; and yet you come and make love to me, and want me to marry you. You don't lack confidence, certainly."

Commander Dibbs, R.N. was hurt; but he did not become dramatic. He felt the point of his torpedo-cut beard, and smiled up pluckily at her—she was much taller than he.

"I know the thing went against me rather," he said, "but it was all wrong, I assure you. It's cheeky, of course, to come to you like this so soon after, but for two years I've been looking forward up there in the China Sea to meeting you again. You don't know what a beast of a station it is—besides, I didn't think you'd believe the charge."

"The charge was that you had endangered the safety of one of her Majesty's cruisers by trying to run through an unexplored opening in the Barrier Reef. Was that it?"

"That was it."

"And you didn't endanger her?"

"Yes, I did, but not wilfully, of course, nor yet stupidly."

"I read the evidence, and, frankly, it looked like stupidity."

"I haven't been called stupid usually, have I?"

"No. I've heard you called many things, but never that."

Every inch of his five-feet-five was pluck. He could take her shots broadside, and laugh while he winced. "You've heard me called a good many things not complimentary, I suppose, for I know I'm not much to look at, and I've an edge to my tongue sometimes. What is the worst thing *you* ever said of me?" he added a little bitterly.

"What I say to you now—though, by the way, I've never said it before—that your self-confidence is appalling. Don't you know that I'm very popular, that they say I'm clever, and that I'm a *tall*, good-looking girl?"

She looked down at him, and said it with such a delightful *naïveté*, through which a tone of raillery ran, that it did not sound as it may read. She knew her full value, but no one had ever accused her of vanity—she was simply the most charming, outspoken girl in the biggest city of Australia.

"Yes, I know all that," he replied with an honest laugh. "When you were a little child,—according to your mother,—and were told you were not good, you said: 'No, I'm not good—I'm only beautiful.'"

Dibbs had a ready tongue, and nothing else he said at the moment could have had so good an effect. She laughed softly and merrily. "You have awkward little corners in your talk at times. I wonder they didn't reduce you at the court-martial. You were rather keen with your words once or twice there."

A faint flush ran over Dibbs's face, but he smiled through it, and didn't give away an inch of self-possession. "If the board had been women, I'd have

been reduced right enough—women don't go by evidence, but by their feelings; they don't know what justice really is, though by nature they've some undisciplined generosity."

"There again you are foolish. I'm a woman. Now why do you say such things to me, especially when—when you are aspiring! Properly, I ought to punish you. But why did you say those sharp things at your trial? They probably told against you."

"I said them because I felt them, and I hate flummery and thick-headedness. I was as respectful as I could be; but there were things about the trial I didn't like—irregular things, which the Admiral himself, who knows his business, set right."

"I remember the Admiral said there were points about the case that he couldn't quite understand, but that they could only go by such testimony as they had."

"Exactly," he said sententiously.

She wheeled softly on him, and looked him full in the eyes. "What other testimony was there to offer?"

"We are getting a long way from our starting-point," he answered evasively. "We were talking of a more serious matter."

"But a matter with which this very thing has to do, Neddie Dibbs. There's a mystery somewhere. I've asked Archie; but he won't say a word about it, except that he doesn't think you were to blame."

"Your brother is a cautious fellow." Then, hurriedly: "He is quite right to express no opinion as to any mystery. Least said soonest mended."

"You mean that it is proper not to discuss professional matters in society?"

"That's it." A change had passed over Dibbs's face—it was slightly paler, but his voice was genial and inconsequential.

"Come and sit down at the Point," she said.

They went to a cliff which ran out from one corner of the garden, and sat down on a bench. Before them stretched the harbour, dotted with sails; men-of-war lay at anchor, among them the little *Ruby*, Commander Dibbs's cruiser. Pleasure-steamers went hurrying along to many shady harbours; a tall-masted schooner rode grandly in between the Heads, balanced with foam; and a beach beneath them shone like opal: it was a handsome sight.

For a time they were silent. At last he said: "I know I haven't much to recommend me. I'm a little beggar—nothing to look at; I'm pretty poor; I've had no influence to push me on; and just at the critical point in my career—when I was expecting promotion —I get this set-back, and lose your good opinion, which is more to me, though I say it bluntly like a sailor, than the praise of all the Lords of the Admiralty, if it could be got. You see, I always was ambitious; I was certain I'd be a captain; I swore I'd be an admiral one day; and I fell in love with the best girl in the world, and said I'd not give up thinking I would marry her until and unless I saw her wearing another man's name—and I don't know that I should even then."

"Now that sounds complicated—or wicked," she said, her face turned away from him.

"Believe me, it is not complicated; and men marry widows sometimes."

"You are shocking," she said, turning on him with a flush to her cheek and an angry glitter in her eye.

"How dare you speak so cold-bloodedly and thoughtlessly?"

"I am not cold-blooded or thoughtless, nor yet shocking. I only speak what is in my mind with my usual crudeness. I know it sounds insolent of me, but, after all, it is only being bold with the woman for whom—half-disgraced, insignificant, but unquenchable fellow as I am—I'd do as much as, and, maybe, dare more for than any one of the men who would marry her if they could."

"I like ambitious men," she said relenting, and meditatively pushing the grass with her tennis-racket; "but ambition isn't everything, is it? There must be some kind of fulfilment to turn it into capital, as it were. Don't let me hurt your feelings, but you haven't done a great deal yet, have you?"

"No, I haven't. There must be occasion. The chance to do something big may start up any time, however. You never can tell when things will come your way. You've got to be ready, that's all."

"You are very confident."

"You'll call me a prig directly, perhaps, but I can't help that. I've said things to you that I've never said to any one in the world, and I don't regret saying them."

She looked at him earnestly. She had never been made love to in this fashion. There was no sentimentalism in it, only straightforward feeling, forceful, yet gentle. She knew he was aware that the Admiral of his squadron had paid, and was paying, court to her; that a titled aide-de-camp at Government House was conspicuously attentive; that one of the richest squatters in the country was ready to make astonishing settlements at any moment; and that there was not a young man of note acquainted with her who did

not offer her gallant service—in the ball-room. She smiled as she thought of it. He was certainly not large, but no finer head was ever set on a man's shoulders, powerful, strongly outlined, nobly balanced. The eyes were everywhere; searching, indomitable, kind. It was a head for a sculptor. Ambition became it well. She had studied that head from every stand-point, and had had the keenest delight in talking to the man. But, as he said, that was two years before, and he had had bad luck since then.

She suddenly put this question to him: "Tell me all the truth about that accident to the *Ruby*. You have been hiding something. The Admiral was right, I know. Some evidence was not forthcoming that would have thrown a different light on the affair."

"I can tell you nothing," he promptly replied.

"I shall find out one day," she said.

"I hope not; though I'm grateful that you wish to do so."

He rose hurriedly to his feet; he was looking at the harbour below. He raised the field-glass he had carried from the veranda to his eyes. He was watching a yacht making across the bay towards them.

She spoke again. "You are going again to-morrow?"

"Yes; all the ships of the squadron but one get away."

"How long shall you be gone?"

"Six months at least— Great God!"

He had not taken the glasses from his eyes as they talked, but had watched the yacht as she came on to get under the lee of the high shore at their right. He had noticed that one of those sudden fierce winds, called Southerly Busters, was sweeping down towards the craft, and would catch it when it came round

sharp, as it must do. He recognised the boat also. It belonged to Laura Harman's father, and her brother Archie was in it. The gale caught the yacht as Dibbs foresaw, and swamped her. He dropped the glass, cried to the girl to follow, and in a minute had scrambled down the cliff, and thrown off most of his things. He had launched a skiff by the time the girl reached the shore. She got in without a word. She was deadly pale, but full of nerve. They rowed hard to where they could see two men clinging to the yacht; there had been three in it. The two men were not hauled in, for the gale was blowing too hard, but they clung to the rescuing skiff. The girl's brother was not to be seen. Instantly Dibbs dived under the yacht. It seemed an incredible time before he reappeared; but when he did, he had a body with him. Blood was coming from his nose, the strain of holding his breath had been so great. It was impossible to get the insensible body into the skiff. He grasped the side, and held the boy's head up. The girl rowed hard, but made little headway. Other rescue boats arrived presently, however, and they were all got to shore safely.

Lieutenant Archie Harman did not die. Animation was restored after great difficulty, but he did not sail away with the *Ruby* next morning to the Polynesian Islands. Another man took his place.

Little was said between Commander Dibbs and Laura Harman at parting late that night. She came from her brother's bedside and laid her hand upon his arm. "It is good," she said, "for a man to be brave as well as ambitious. You are sure to succeed; and I shall be proud of you, for—for you saved my brother's life, you see," she timidly added; and she was not often timid.

Five months after, when the *Ruby* was lying with the flag-ship off one of the Marshall Islands, a packet of letters was brought from Fiji by a trading-schooner. One was for Commander Dibbs. It said in brief: "You saved my brother's life—that was brave. You saved his honour—that was noble. He has told me all. He will resign and clear you when the Admiral returns. You are a good man."

"He ought to be kicked," Dibbs said to himself. "Did the cowardly beggar think I did it for *him*—blast him!"

He raged inwardly; but he soon had something else to think of, for a hurricane came down on them as they lay in a trap of coral with only one outlet, which the *Ruby* had surveyed that day. He took his ship out gallantly, but the flag-ship dare not attempt it—Dibbs was the only man who knew the passage thoroughly. He managed to land on the shore below the harbour, and then, with a rope round him, essayed to reach the flag-ship from the beach. It was a wild chance, but he got there badly battered. Still, he took her with her Admiral out to the open safely.

That was how Dibbs became captain of a great iron-clad.

Archie Harman did not resign; Dibbs would not let him. Only Archie's sister knew that he was responsible for the accident to the *Ruby*, which nearly cost Dibbs his reputation; for he and Dibbs had surveyed the passage in the Barrier Reef when serving on another ship, and he had neglected instructions and wrongly and carelessly interpreted the chart. And Dibbs had held his tongue.

One evening Laura Harman said to Captain Dibbs: "Which would you rather be—Admiral of the Fleet

or my husband?" Her hand was on his arm at the time.

He looked up at her proudly, and laughed slyly. "I mean to be both, dear girl."

"You have an incurable ambition," she said.

A LITTLE MASQUERADE

"Oh, nothing matters," she said, with a soft, ironical smile, as she tossed a bit of sugar to the cockatoo.

"Quite so," was his reply, and he carefully gathered in a loose leaf of his cigar. Then, after a pause: "And yet, why so? It's a very pretty world one way and another."

"Yes, it's a pretty world at times."

At that moment they were both looking out over a part of the world known as the Nindobar Plains, and it was handsome to the eye. As far as could be seen was a carpet of flowers under a soft sunset. The homestead by which they sat was in a wilderness of blossoms. To the left was a high rose-coloured hill, solemn and mysterious; to the right—afar off—a forest of gum-trees, pink and purple against the horizon. At their feet, beyond the veranda, was a garden joyously brilliant, and bright-plumaged birds flitted here and there.

The two looked out for a long time, then, as if by a mutual impulse, suddenly turned their eyes on each other. They smiled, and, somehow, that smile was not delightful to see. The girl said presently: "It is all on the surface."

Jack Sherman gave a little click of the tongue peculiar to him, and said: "You mean that the beautiful birds have dreadful voices; that the flowers are scentless; that the leaves of the trees are all on edge and give no shade; that where that beautiful carpet of blossoms is there was a blazing quartz plain six months

ago, and there's likely to be the same again; that, in brief, it's pretty, but hollow." He made a slight fantastic gesture, as though mocking himself for so long a speech, and added: "Really, I didn't prepare this little oration."

She nodded, and then said: "Oh, it's not so hollow, —you would not call it that exactly,—but it's unsatisfactory."

"You have lost your illusions."

"And before that occurred you had lost yours."

"Do I betray it, then?" He laughed, not at all bitterly, yet not with cheerfulness.

"And do you think that you have such acuteness, then, and I—" Nellie Hayden paused, raised her eyebrows a little coldly, and let the cockatoo bite her finger.

"I did not mean to be egotistical. The fact is I live my life alone, and I was interested for the moment to know how I appeared to others. You and I have been tolerably candid with each other since we met, for the first time, three days ago; I knew you would not hesitate to say what was in your mind, and I asked out of honest curiosity. One fancies one hides one's self, and yet—you see!"

"Do you find it pleasant, then, to be candid and free with some one? . . . Why with me?" She looked him frankly in the eyes.

"Well, to be more candid. You and I know the world very well, I fancy. You were educated in Europe, travelled, enjoyed—and suffered." The girl did not even blink, but went on looking at him steadily. "We have both had our hour with the world; have learned many sides of the game. We haven't come out of it without scars of one kind or another. Knowledge of the kind is expensive."

"You wanted to say all that to me the first evening we met, didn't you?" There was a smile of gentle amusement on her face.

"I did. From the moment I saw you I knew that we could say many things to each other 'without preliminaries.' To be able to do that is a great deal."

"It is a relief to say things, isn't it?"

"It is better than writing them, though that is pleasant, after its kind."

"I have never tried writing—as we talk. There's a good deal of vanity at the bottom of it though, I believe."

"Of course. But vanity is a kind of virtue, too." He leaned over towards her, dropping his arms on his knees and holding her look. "I am very glad that I met you. I intended only staying here over night, but—"

"But I interested you in a way—you see, I am vain enough to think that. Well, you also interested me, and I urged my aunt to press you to stay. It has been very pleasant, and when you go it will be very humdrum again; our conversation, mustering, rounding-up, bullocks, and rabbits. That, of course, is engrossing in a way, but not for long at a time."

He did not stir, but went on looking at her. "Yes, I believe it has been pleasant for you, else it had not been so pleasant for me. Honestly, I don't believe I shall ever get you out of my mind."

"That is either slightly rude or badly expressed," she said. "Do you wish, then, to get me out of your mind?"

"No, no— You are very keen. I wish to remember you always. But what I felt at the moment was this. There are memories which are always passive and delightful. We have no wish to live the scenes of

which they are over again, the reflection is enough. There are others which cause us to wish the scenes back again, with a kind of hunger; and yet they won't or can't come back. I wondered of what class this memory would be."

The girl flushed ever so slightly, and her fingers clasped a little nervously, but she was calm. Her voice was even; it had, indeed, a little thrilling ring of energy. "You are wonderfully daring," she replied, "to say that to me. To a school-girl it might mean so much: to me—!" She shook her head at him reprovingly.

He was not in the least piqued. "I was absolutely honest in that. I said nothing but what I felt. I would give very much to feel confident one way or the other—forgive me, for what seems incredible egotism. If I were five years younger I should have said instantly that the memory would be one—"

"Which would disturb you, make you restless, cause you to neglect your work, fill you with regret; and yet all too late—isn't that it?" She laughed lightly and gave a lump of sugar to the cockatoo.

"You read me accurately. But why touch your words with satire?"

"I believe I read you better than you read me. I didn't mean to be satirical. Don't you know that what often seems irony directed towards others is in reality dealt out to ourselves? Such irony as was in my voice was for myself."

"And why for yourself?" he asked quietly, his eyes full of interest. He was cutting the end of a fresh cigar. "Was it"—he was about to strike a match, but paused suddenly—"was it because you had thought the same thing?"

She looked for a moment as though she would read him through and through; as though, in spite of all their candour, there was some lingering uncertainty as to his perfect straightforwardness; then, as if satisfied, she said at last: "Yes, but with a difference. I have no doubt which memory it will be. You will not wish to be again on the plains of Nindobar."

"And you," he said musingly, "you will not wish me here?" There was no real vanity in the question. He was wondering how little we can be sure of what we shall feel to-morrow from what we feel to-day. Besides, he knew that a wise woman is wiser than a wise man.

"I really don't think I shall care particularly. Probably, if we met again here, there would be some jar to our comradeship—I may call it that, I suppose?"

"Which is equivalent to saying that good-bye in most cases, and always in cases such as ours, is a little tragical, because we can never meet quite the same again."

She bowed her head, but did not reply. Presently she glanced up at him kindly. "What would you give to have back the past you had before you lost your illusions, before you had—trouble?"

"I do not want it back. I am not really disillusionised. I think that we should not make our own personal experience a law unto the world. I believe in the world in spite—of trouble. You might have said trouble with a woman—I should not have minded."

He was smoking now, and the clouds twisted about his face so that only his eyes looked through earnestly.

"A woman always makes laws from her personal experience. She has not the faculty of generalisation —I fancy that's the word to use."

She rose now with a little shaking motion, one hand at her belt, and rested a shoulder against a pillar of the veranda. He rose also at once, and said, touching her hand respectfully with his finger tips: "We may be sorry one day that we did not believe in ourselves more."

"Oh, no," she said, turning and smiling at him, "I think not. You will be in England hard at work, I here hard at living; our interests will lie far apart. I am certain about it all. We might have been what my cousin calls 'trusty pals'—no more."

"I wish to God I felt sure of that."

She held out her hand to him. "I believe you are honest in this. I expect both of us have played hide-and-seek with sentiment in our time; but it would be useless for us to masquerade with each other: we are of the world, very worldly."

"Quite useless—here comes your cousin! I hope I don't look as agitated as I feel."

"You look perfectly cool, and I know I do. What an art this living is! My cousin comes about the boar-hunt to-morrow."

"Shall you join us?"

"Of course. I can handle a rifle. Besides, it is your last day here."

"Who can tell what to-morrow may bring forth?" he said.

. . . . . .

The next day the boar-hunt occurred. They rode several miles to a little lake and a scrub of brigalow, and, dismounting, soon had exciting sport. Nellie was a capital shot, and, without loss of any womanliness, was a thorough sportsman. To-day, however, there was something on her mind, and she was not as alert

and successful as usual. Sherman kept with her as much as possible—the more so because he saw that her cousins, believing she was quite well able to take care of herself, gave her to her own resources. Presently, however, following an animal, he left her a distance behind.

On the edge of a little billabong she came upon a truculent boar. It turned on her, but she fired, and it fell. Seeing another ahead, she pushed on quickly to secure it, too. As she went she half-cocked her rifle. Had her mind been absolutely intent on the sport, she had full cocked it. All at once she heard the thud of feet behind her. She turned swiftly, and saw the boar she had shot bearing upon her, its long yellow tusks standing up like daggers. A sweeping thrust from one of them leaves little chance of life.

She dropped upon a knee, swung her rifle to her shoulder, and pulled the trigger. The rifle did not go off. For an instant she did not grasp the trouble. With singular presence of mind, however, she neither lowered her rifle nor took her eye from the beast; she remained immovable. It was all a matter of seconds. Evidently cowed, the animal, when within a few feet of her, swerved to the right, then made as though to come down on her again. But, meanwhile, she had discovered her mistake, and cocked her rifle. She swiftly trained it on the boar, and fired. It was hit, but did not fall; and came on. Then another shot rang out from behind her, and the boar fell so near her that its tusk caught her dress.

Jack Sherman had saved her.

She was very white when she faced him. She could not speak. That night, however, she spoke very gratefully and almost tenderly.

To something that he said gently to her then about a memory, she replied: "Tell me now as candidly as if to your own soul, did you feel at the critical moment that life would be horrible and empty without me?"

"I thought only of saving you," he said honestly.

"Then I was quite right; you will never have any regret," she said.

"I wonder, ah, I wonder!" he added sorrowfully.

But the girl was sure.

The regret was hers; though he never knew that.

It is a lonely life on the dry plains of Nindobar.

DERELICT

DERELICT

He was very drunk; and because of that Victoria Lindley, barmaid at O'Fallen's, was angry—not at him but at O'Fallen, who had given him the liquor.

She knew more about him than any one else. The first time she saw him he was not sober. She had left the bar-room empty; and when she came back he was there with others who had dropped in, evidently attracted by his unusual appearance—he wore an eye-glass—and he had been saying something whimsically audacious to Dicky Merritt, who, slapping him on the shoulder, had asked him to have a swizzle.

Dicky Merritt had a ripe sense of humour, and he was the first to grin. This was followed by loud laughs from others, and these laughs went out where the dust lay a foot thick and soft like precipitated velvet, and hurrying over the street, waked the Postmaster and roused the Little Milliner, who at once came to their doors. Catching sight of each other, they nodded, and blushed, and nodded again; and then the Postmaster, neglecting the business of the country, went upon his own business into the private sitting-room of the Little Milliner; for those wandering laughs from O'Fallen's had done the work set for them by the high powers.

Over in the hot bar-room the man with the eye-glass was being frankly "intr'juced" to Dicky Merritt and Company, Limited, by Victoria Lindley, who, as hostess of this saloon, was, in his eyes, on a footing of acquaintance. To her he raised his hat with accentuated

form, and murmured his name—"Mr. Jones—Mr. Jones." Forthwith, that there might be no possible unpleasantness—for even such hostesses have their duties of tact—she politely introduced him as Mr. Jones.

He had been a man of innumerable occupations—nothing long: caretaker of tanks, rabbit-trapper, boundary-rider, cook at a shearers' camp, and, in due time, he became book-keeper at O'Fallen's. That was due to Vic. Mr. Jones wrote a very fine hand—not in the least like a business man—when he was moderately sober, and he also had an exceedingly caustic wit when he chose to use it. He used it once upon O'Fallen, who was a rough, mannerless creature, with a good enough heart, but easily irritated by the man with the eye-glass, whose superior intellect and manner, even when drunk, were too noticeable. He would never have employed him were it not for Vic, who was worth very much money to him in the course of the year. She was the most important person within a radius of a hundred and fifty miles, not excepting Rembrandt, the owner of Bomba Station, which was twenty miles square, nor the parson at Magari, ninety miles south, by the Ring-Tail Billabong. For both Rembrandt and the parson had, and showed, a respect for her, which might appear startling were it seen in Berkeley Square or the Strand.

When, therefore, O'Fallen came raging into the bar-room one morning, with the gentle remark that "he'd roast the tongue of her fancy gent if he didn't get up and git," he did a foolish thing. It was the first time that he had insulted Victoria, and it was the last. She came out white and quiet from behind the bar-counter, and, as he retreated from her into a corner, said: "There is not a man who drinks over this bar, or puts

his horse into your shed, who wouldn't give you the lie to that and thrash you as well—you coward!" Her words came on low and steady: "Mr. Jones will go now, of course, but I shall go also."

This awed O'Fallen. To lose Vic was to lose the reputation of his house. He instantly repented, but she turned her shoulder on him, and went into the little hot office, where the book-keeper was, leaving him gesticulating as he swore at himself in the glass behind the bar. When she entered the room she found Mr. Jones sitting rigid on his stool, looking at the open ledger before him. She spoke his name. He nodded ever so slightly, but still looked hard at the book. She knew his history. Once he had told it to her. It happened one day when he had resigned his position as boundary-rider, in which he was practically useless. He had been drinking, and, as he felt for the string of his eye-glass, his fingers caught another thin black cord which protruded slightly from his vest. He drew it out by mistake, and a small gold cross shone for a moment against the faded black coat. His fingers felt for it to lift it to his eye as though it were his eye-glass, but dropped it suddenly. He turned pale for a minute, then caught it as suddenly again, and thrust it into his waistcoat. But Vic had seen, and she had very calm, intelligent eyes, and a vast deal of common sense, though she had only come from out Tibbooburra way. She kept her eyes on him kindly, knowing that he would speak in time. They were alone, for most of the people of Wadgery were away at a picnic. There is always one moment when a man who has a secret, good or bad, fatal or otherwise, feels that he must tell it or die. And Mr. Jones told Vic, and she said what she could, though she knew that a grasp of her firm

hands was better than any words; and she was equally sure in her own mind that word and grasp would be of no avail in the end.

She saw that the beginning of the end had come as she looked at him staring at the ledger, yet exactly why she could not tell. She knew that he had been making a fight since he had been book-keeper, and that now he felt that he had lost. She guessed also that he had heard what O'Fallen said to her, and what she had replied.

"You ought not to have offended him," she tried to say severely.

"It had to come," he said with a dry, crackling laugh, and he fastened his eye-glass in his eye. "I wasn't made for this. I could only do one thing, and—" He laughed that peculiar laugh again, got down from the stool, and held out his hand to her.

"What do you intend?" she said.

"I'm going, of course. Good-bye!"

"But not at once?" she said very kindly.

"Perhaps not just at once," he answered with a strange smile.

She did not know what to say or do; there are puzzling moments even for a wise woman, and there is nothing wiser than that.

He turned at the door. "God bless you!" he said. Then, as if caught in an act to be atoned for, he hurried out into the street. From the door she watched him till the curtains of dust rose up about him and hid him from sight. When he came back to Wadgery months after he was a terrible wreck; so much so that Vic could hardly look at him at first; and she wished that she had left O'Fallen's as she threatened, and so have no need to furnish any man swizzles. She knew he

would never pull himself together now. It was very weak of him, and horrible, but then . . . When that thirst gets into the blood, and there's something behind the man's life too—as Dicky Merritt said, "It's a case for the little black angels."

Vic would not give him liquor. He got it, however, from other sources. He was too far gone to feel any shame now. His sensibilities were all blunted. One day he babbled over the bar-counter to O'Fallen, desiring greatly that they should be reconciled. To that end he put down the last shilling he had for a swizzle, and was so outrageously offended when O'Fallen refused to take it, that the silver was immediately swept into the till; and very soon, with his eye-glass to his eye, Mr. Jones was drunk.

That was the occasion mentioned in the first sentence of this history, when Vic was very angry.

The bar-room was full. Men were wondering why it was that the Postmaster and the Little Milliner, who went to Magari ten days before, to get married by the parson there, had not returned. While they talked and speculated, the weekly coach from Magari came up slowly to the door, and, strange to say, without a blast from the driver's horn. Dicky Merritt and Company rushed out to ask news of the two truants, and were met with a warning wave of the driver's hand, and a "Sh—h! sh—!" as he motioned towards the inside of the coach. There they found the Postmaster and the Little Milliner mere skeletons, and just alive. They were being cared for by a bushman, who had found them in the plains, delirious and nearly naked. They had got lost, there being no regular road over the plains, and their horse, which they had not tethered properly, had gone large. They had been days with-

out food and water when they were found near the coach-track.

They were carried into O'Fallen's big sitting-room. Dicky brought the doctor, who said that they both would die, and soon. Hours passed. The sufferers at last became sane and conscious, as though they could not go without something being done. The Postmaster lifted a hand to his pocket. Dicky Merritt took out of it a paper. It was the marriage licence. The Little Milliner's eyes were painful to see; she was not dying happy. The Postmaster, too, moved his head from side to side in trouble. He reached over and took her hand. She drew it back, shuddering a little. "The ring! The ring!" she whispered.

"It is lost," he said.

Vic, who was at the woman's head, understood. She stooped, said something in her ear, then in that of the Postmaster, and left the room. When she came back, two minutes later, Mr. Jones was with her. What she had done to him to sober him no one ever knew. But he had a book in his hand, and on the dingy black of his waistcoat there shone a little gold cross. He came to where the two lay. Vic drew from her finger a ring. What then occurred was never forgotten by any who saw it; and you could feel the stillness, it was so great, after a high, sing-song voice said: "*Those whom God hath joined let no man put asunder.*"

The two lying cheek by cheek knew now that they could die in peace.

The sing-song voice rose again in the ceremony of blessing, but suddenly it quavered and broke, the man rose, dropping the prayer-book to the floor, and ran quickly out of the room and into the dust of the street, and on, on into the plains.

"In the name of God, who is he?" said Dicky Merritt to Victoria Lindley.

"He was the Reverend Jones Leverton, of Harford-on-Thames," was her reply.

"Once a priest, always a priest," added Dicky.

"He'll never come back," said the girl, tears dropping from her eyes.

And she was right.

OLD ROSES

OLD ROSES

It was a barren country, and Wadgery was generally shrivelled with heat, but he always had roses in his garden, on his window-sill, or in his button-hole. Growing flowers under difficulties was his recreation. That was why he was called Old Roses. It was not otherwise inapt, for there was something antique about him, though he wasn't old; a flavour, an old-fashioned repose and self-possession. He was Inspector of Tanks for this God-forsaken country. Apart from his duties he kept mostly to himself, though when not travelling he always went down to O'Fallen's Hotel once a day for a glass of whisky and water—whisky kept especially for him; and as he drank this slowly he talked to Victoria Lindley the barmaid, or to any chance visitors whom he knew. He never drank with any one, nor asked any one to drink; and, strange to say, no one resented this. As Vic said: "He was different." Dicky Merritt, the solicitor, who was hail-fellow with squatter, homestead lessee, cockatoo-farmer, and shearer, called him "a lively old buffer." It was he, indeed, who gave him the name of Old Roses. Dicky sometimes went over to Long Neck Billabong, where Old Roses lived, for a reel, as he put it, and he always carried away a deep impression of the Inspector's qualities.

"Had his day," said Dicky in O'Fallen's sitting-room one night, "in marble halls, or I'm a Jack. Run neck and neck with almighty swells once. Might live here for a thousand years and he'd still be the

nonesuch of the back-blocks. I'd patent him—file my caveat for him to-morrow, if I could, bully Old Roses!"

Victoria Lindley, the barmaid, lifted her chin slightly from her hands, as she leaned through the opening between the bar and the sitting-room, and said: "Mr. Merritt, Old Roses is a gentleman; and a gentleman is a gentleman till he—"

"Till he humps his bluey into the Never Never Land, Vic? But what do you know about gentlemen, anyway? You were born only five miles from the jumping-off place, my dear."

"Oh," was the quiet reply, "a woman—the commonest woman—knows a gentleman by instinct. It isn't what they do, it's what they don't do; and Old Roses doesn't do lots of things."

"Right you are, Victoria, right you are again! You do Tibbooburra credit. Old Roses has the root of the matter in him—and there you have it."

Dicky had a profound admiration for Vic. She had brains, was perfectly fearless, no man had ever taken a liberty with her, and every one in the Wadgery country who visited O'Fallen's had a wholesome respect for her opinion.

About this time news came that the Governor, Lord Malice, would pass through Wadgery on his tour up the back-blocks. A great function was necessary. It was arranged. Then came the question of the address of welcome to be delivered at the banquet. Dicky Merritt and the local doctor were named for the task, but they both declared they'd only "make rot of it," and suggested Old Roses.

They went to lay the thing before him. They found him in his garden. He greeted them, smiling in his

quiet, enigmatical way, and listened. While Dicky spoke, a flush slowly passed over him, and then immediately left him pale; but he stood perfectly still, his hand leaning against a sandal tree, and the coldness of his face warmed up again slowly. His head having been bent attentively as he listened, they did not see anything unusual.

After a moment of inscrutable deliberation, he answered that he would do as they wished. Dicky hinted that he would require some information about Lord Malice's past career and his family's history, but he assured them that he did not need it; and his eyes idled ironically with Dicky's face.

When the two had gone, Old Roses sat in his room, a handful of letters, a photograph, and a couple of decorations spread out before him, his fingers resting on them, his look engaged with a far horizon.

The Governor came. He was met outside the township by the citizens and escorted in—a dusty and numerous cavalcade. They passed the Inspector's house. The garden was blooming, and on the roof a flag was flying. Struck by the singular character of the place Lord Malice asked who lived there, and proposed stopping for a moment to make the acquaintance of its owner; adding, with some slight sarcasm, that if the officers of the Government were too busy to pay their respects to their Governor, their Governor must pay his respects to them. But Old Roses was not in the garden nor in the house, and they left without seeing him. He was sitting under a willow at the billabong, reading over and over to himself the address to be delivered before the Governor in the evening. As he read his face had a wintry and inhospitable look.

The night came. Old Roses entered the dining-room quietly with the crowd, far in the Governor's wake. According to his request, he was given a seat in a distant corner, where he was quite inconspicuous. Most of the men present were in evening dress. He wore a plain tweed suit, but carried a handsome rose in his button-hole. It was impossible to put him at a disadvantage. He looked distinguished as he was. He appeared to be much interested in Lord Malice. The early proceedings were cordial, for the Governor and his suite made themselves agreeable, and talk flowed amiably. After a time there was a rattle of knives and forks, and the Chairman rose. Then, after a chorus of "hear, hears," there was general silence. The doorways of the room were filled by the women-servants of the hotel. Chief among them was Vic, who kept her eyes fixed on Old Roses. She knew that he was to read the address and speak, and she was more interested in him and in his success than in Lord Malice and his suite. Her admiration of him was great. He had always treated her as though she had been born a lady, and it had done her good.

"And I call upon Mr. Adam Sherwood to speak to the health of His Excellency, Lord Malice."

In his modest corner Old Roses stretched to his feet. The Governor glanced over carelessly. He only saw a figure in grey, with a rose in his button-hole. The Chairman whispered that it was the owner of the house and garden which had interested His Excellency that afternoon. His Excellency looked a little closer, but saw only a rim of iron-grey hair above the paper held before Old Roses' face.

Then a voice came from behind the paper: "Your Excellency—"

At the first words the Governor started, and his eyes flashed searchingly, curiously at the paper that walled the face, and at the iron-grey hair. The voice rose distinct and clear, with modulated emphasis. It had a peculiarly penetrating quality. A few in the room—and particularly Vic—were struck by something in the voice: that it resembled another voice. She soon found the trail. Her eyes also fastened on the paper. Then she moved and went to another door. Here she could see behind the paper at an angle. Her eyes ran from the screened face to that of the Governor. His Excellency had dropped the lower part of his face in his hand, and he was listening intently. Vic noticed that his eyes were painfully grave and concerned. She also noticed other things.

The address was strange. It had been submitted to the Committee, and though it struck them as out-of-the-wayish, it had been approved. It seemed different when read as Old Roses was reading it. The words sounded inclement as they were chiselled out by the speaker's voice. Dicky Merritt afterwards declared that many phrases were interpolated by Old Roses at the moment.

The speaker referred intimately and with peculiar knowledge to the family history of Lord Malice, to certain more or less private matters which did not concern the public, to the antiquity of the name, and the high duty devolving upon one who bore the Earldom of Malice. He dwelt upon the personal character of His Excellency's antecedents, and praised their honourable services to the country. He referred to the death of Lord Malice's eldest brother in Burmah, but he did it strangely. Then, with acute incisiveness, he drew a picture of what a person in so exalted a position

as a Governor should be and should not be. His voice assuredly at this point had a touch of scorn. The aides-de-camp were nervous, the Chairman apprehensive, the Committee ill at ease. But the Governor now was perfectly still, though, as Vic Lindley thought, rather pinched and old-looking. His fingers toyed with a wine-glass, but his eyes never wavered from that paper and the grey hair.

Presently the voice of the speaker changed.

"But," said he, "in Lord Malice we have—the perfect Governor; a man of blameless and enviable life, and possessed abundantly of discreetness, judgment, administrative ability and power; the absolute type of English nobility and British character."

He dropped the paper from before his face, and his eyes met those of the Governor, and stayed. Lord Malice let go a long choking breath, which sounded like immeasurable relief. During the rest of the speech —delivered in a fine-tempered voice—he sat as in a dream, his eyes intently upon the other, who now seemed to recite rather than read. He thrilled all by the pleasant resonance of his tones, and sent the blood aching delightfully through Victoria Lindley's veins.

When he sat down there was immense applause. The Governor rose in reply. He spoke in a low voice, but any one listening outside would have said that Old Roses was still speaking. By this resemblance the girl, Vic, had trailed to others. It was now apparent to many, but Dicky said afterwards that it was simply a case of birth and breeding—men used to walking red carpet grew alike, just as stud-owners and rabbit-catchers did.

The last words of the Governor's reply were delivered in a convincing tone as his eyes hung on Old Roses' face.

"And, as I am indebted to you, gentlemen, for the feelings of loyalty to the Throne which prompted this reception and the address just delivered, so I am indebted to Mr.—Adam Sherwood for his admirable words and the unusual sincerity and eloquence of his speech; and to both you and him for most notable kindness."

Immediately after the Governor's speech Old Roses stole out; but as he passed through the door where Vic stood, his hand brushed against hers. Feeling its touch, he grasped it eagerly for an instant as though he were glad of the friendliness in her eyes.

It was just before dawn of the morning that the Governor knocked at the door of the house by Long Neck Billabong. The door opened at once, and he entered without a word.

He and Old Roses stood face to face. His countenance was drawn and worn, the other's cold and calm.

"Tom, Tom," Lord Malice said, "we thought you were dead—"

"That is, Edward, having left me to my fate in Burmah—you were only half a mile away with a column of stout soldiers and hillmen—you waited till my death was reported, and seemed assured, and then came on to England: to take the title, just vacant by our father's death, and to marry my intended wife, who, God knows, appeared to have little care which brother it was! You got both. I was long a prisoner. When I got free, I learned all; I bided my time. I was waiting till you had a child. Twelve years have gone: you have no child. But I shall spare you awhile longer. If your wife should die, or you should yet have a child, I shall return."

The Governor lifted his head wearily from the table where he now sat. "Tom," he said in a low, heavy

voice, "I was always something of a scoundrel, but I've repented of that thing every day of my life since. It has been knives—knives all the way. I am glad—I can't tell you how glad—that you are alive."

He stretched out his hand with a motion of great relief. "I was afraid you were going to speak to-night—to tell all, even though I was your brother. You spared me for the sake—"

"For the sake of the family name," the other interjected stonily.

"For the sake of our name. But I would have taken my punishment, in thankfulness, because you are alive."

"Taken it like a *man*, your Excellency," was the low rejoinder. He laughed bitterly.

"You will not wipe the thing out, Tom? You will not wipe it out, and come back, and take your own—now?" said the other anxiously.

The other dried the perspiration from his forehead.

"I will come back in my own time; and it can never be wiped out. For you shook all my faith in my old world. That's the worst thing that can happen a man. I only believe in the very common people now—those who are not put upon their honour. One doesn't expect it of them, and, unlikely as it is, one isn't often deceived. I think we'd better talk no more about it."

"You mean I had better go."

"I think so. I am going to marry soon." The other started nervously. "You needn't be so shocked. I will come back one day, but not till your wife dies, or you have a child, as I said."

The Governor rose to his feet, and went to the door. "Whom do you intend marrying?" he asked in a voice far from vice-regal, only humbled and disturbed. The reply was instant and keen: "A bar-maid."

The other's hand dropped from the door. But Old Roses, passing over, opened it, and, waiting for the other to pass through, said: "I do not doubt but there will be issue. Good-day, my lord!"

The Governor passed out from the pale light of the lamp into the grey and moist morning. He turned at a point where the house would be lost to view, and saw the other still standing there. The voice of Old Roses kept ringing in his ears sardonically. He knew that his punishment must go on and on; and it did.

Old Roses married Victoria Lindley from "out Tibbooburra way," and there was comely issue, and that issue is now at Eton; for Esau came into his birthright, as he said he would, at his own time. But he and his wife have a way of being indifferent to the gay, astonished world; and, uncommon as it may seem, he has not tired of her.

MY WIFE'S LOVERS

MY WIFE'S LOVERS

THERE were three of them in 1886, the big drought year: old Eversofar, Billy Marshall, and Bingong. I never was very jealous of them, not even when Billy gave undoubted ground for divorce by kissing her boldly in the front garden, with Eversofar and Bingong looking on—to say nothing of myself. So far as public opinion went it could not matter, because we were all living at Tilbar Station in the Tibbooburra country, and the nearest neighbour to us was Mulholland of Nimgi, a hundred miles away. Billy was the son of my manager, John Marshall, and, like his father, had an excellent reputation as a bushman, and, like his mother, was very good-looking. He was very much indeed about my house, suggesting improvements in household arrangements; making remarks on my wife's personal appearance—with corresponding disparagement of myself; riding with my wife across the plains; shooting kangaroos with her by night; and secretly instructing her in the mysteries of a rabbit-trap, with which, he was sure, he could make "dead loads of metal" (he was proficient in the *argot* of the back-blocks); and with this he would buy her a beautiful diamond ring, and a horse that had won the Melbourne Cup, and an air-gun! Once when she was taken ill, and I was away in the South, he used to sit by her bedside, fanning her hour after hour, being scarcely willing to sleep at night; and was always on hand, smoothing her pillow, and issuing a bulletin to Eversofar and Bingong the first thing in the morning. I have no doubt that Eversofar and

Bingong cared for her just as much as he did; but, from first to last, they never had his privileges, and were always subordinate to him in showing her devotion. He was sound and frank with them. He told Eversofar that, of course, she only was kind to him, and let him have a hut all to himself, because he was old and had had a bad time out on the farthest back-station (that was why he was called Eversofar), and had once carried Bingong with a broken leg, on his back, for twenty miles. As for Bingong, he was only a black fellow, aged fifteen, and height inconsiderable. So, of the three, Billy had his own way, and even shamelessly attempted to lord it over me.

Most husbands would consider my position painful, particularly when I say that my wife accepted the attention of all three lovers with calm pleasure, and that of Billy with a shocking indifference to my feelings. She never tried to explain away any circumstance, no matter how awkward it might look if put down in black and white. Billy never quailed before my look; he faced me down with his ingenuous smile; he patted me on the arms approvingly; or, with apparent malice, asked me questions difficult to answer, when I came back from a journey to Brisbane—for a man naturally finds it hard to lay bare how he spent all his time in town. Because he did it so suavely and naïvely, one could not be resentful. It might seem that matters had reached a climax, when, one day, Mulholland came over, and, seeing my wife and her lovers together watering the garden and teaching cockatoos, said to me that Billy had the advantage of me on my own ground. It may not be to my credit that I only grinned, and forbore even looking foolish. Yet I was very fond of my wife all the time. We stood pretty high on the Charwon

Downs, and though it was terribly hot at times, it was healthy enough; and she never lost her prettiness, though, maybe, she lacked bloom.

I think I never saw her look better than she did that day when Mulholland was with me. She had on the lightest, softest kind of stuff, with sleeves reaching only a little below her elbow—her hands and arms never got sunburnt in the hottest weather—her face smiled out from under the coolest-looking hat imaginable, and her hair, though gathered, had a happy trick of always lying very loose and free about the head, saving her from any primness otherwise possible, she was so neat. Mulholland and I were sitting in the veranda. I glanced up at the thermometer, and it registered a hundred in the shade! Mechanically I pushed the lime-juice towards Mulholland, and pointed to the water-bag. There was nothing else to do except grumble at the drought. Yet there my wife was, a picture of coolness and delight; the intense heat seemed only to make her the more refreshing to the eye. Water was not abundant, but we still felt justified in trying to keep her bushes and flowers alive; and she stood there holding the hose and throwing the water in the cheerfulest shower upon the beds. Billy stood with his hands on his hips watching her, very hot, very self-contained. He was shining with perspiration; and he looked the better of it. Eversofar was camped beneath a sandal-tree teaching a cockatoo, also hot and panting, but laughing low through his white beard; and Bingong, black, hatless—less everything but a pair of trousers which only reached to his knees—was dividing his time between the cockatoo and my wife.

Presently Bingong sighted an iguana and caught it, and the three gathered about it in the shade of the san-

dal. After a time the interest in the iguana seemed to have shifted to something else; and they were all speaking very earnestly. At last I saw Billy and my wife only talking. Billy was excited, and apparently indignant. I could not hear what they were saying, but I saw he was pale, and his compatriots in worship rather frightened; for he suddenly got into a lofty rage. It was undoubtedly a quarrel. Mulholland saw, too, and said to me: "This looks as if there would be a chance for you yet." He laughed. So did I.

Soon I saw by my wife's face that she was saying something sarcastical. Then Billy drew himself up very proudly, and waving his hand in a grand way, said loudly, so that we could hear: "It's as true as gospel; and you'll be sorry for this—like anything and anything!" Then he stalked away from her, raising his hat proudly, but immediately turned, and beckoning to Eversofar and Bingong added: "Come on with me to barracks, you two."

They started away towards him, looking sheepishly at my wife as they did so; but Billy finding occasion to give counter-orders, said: "But you needn't come until you put the cockatoos away, and stuck the iguana in a barrel, and put the hose up for—for *her*."

He watched them obey his orders, his head in the air the while, and when they had finished, and were come towards him, he again took off his hat, and they all left her standing alone in the garden.

Then she laughed a little oddly to herself, and stood picking to pieces the wet leaves of a geranium, looking after the three. After a little she came slowly over to us. "Well," said I, feigning great irony, "all loves must have their day, both old and new. You see how they've deserted you. Yet you smile at it!"

"Indeed, my lord and master," she said, "it is not a thing to laugh at. It's very serious."

"And what has broken the charm of your companionship?" I asked.

"The mere matter of the fabled Bunyip. He claimed that he had seen it, and I doubted his word. Had it been you it would not have mattered. You would have turned the other cheek, you are so tame. But he has fire and soul, and so we quarrelled."

"And your other lovers turned tail," I maliciously said.

"Which only shows how superior he is," was her reply. "If you had been in the case they would never have left me."

"Oh, oh!" blurted Mulholland, "I am better out of this; for I little care to be called as a witness in divorce." He rose from his chair, but I pushed him back, and he did not leave till "the cool of the evening."

The next morning, at breakfast-time, a rouseabout brought us a piece of paper which had been nailed to the sandal-tree. On it was written:

"We have gone for the Bunyip. We travel on foot! Farewell and Farewell!"

We had scarcely read it, when John Marshall and his wife came in agitation, and said that Billy's bed had not been slept in during the night. From the rouseabout we found that Eversofar and Bingong were also gone. They had not taken horses, doubtless because Billy thought it would hardly be valiant and adventurous enough, and because neither Bingong nor Eversofar owned one, and it might look criminal to go off with mine. We suspected that they had headed for the great Debil-debil Waterhole, where, it was said, the Bunyip appeared: that mysterious animal, or devil, or

thing, which nobody has ever seen, but many have pretended to see. Now, this must be said of Billy, that he never had the feeling of fear—he was never even afraid of me. He had often said he had seen a Bunyip, and that he'd bring one home some day, but no one took him seriously. It showed what great influence he had over his companions, that he could induce them to go with him; for Bingong, being a native, must naturally have a constitutional fear of the Debil-debil, as the Bunyip is often called. The Debil-debil Waterhole was a long way off, and through a terrible country—quartz plains, ragged scrub, and little or no water all the way. Then, had they taken plenty of food with them? So far as we could see, they had taken some, but we could not tell how much.

My wife smiled at the business at first; then became worried as the day wore on, and she could see the danger and hardship of wandering about this forsaken country without a horse and with uncertain water. The day passed. They did not return. We determined on a search the next morning. At daybreak, Marshall and I and the rouseabout started on good horses, each going at different angles, but agreeing to meet at the Debil-debil Waterhole, and to wait there for each other. If any one of us did not come after a certain time, we were to conclude that he had found the adventurers and was making his way back with them. After a day of painful travel and little water, Marshall and I arrived, almost within an hour of each other. We could see no sign of anybody having been at the lagoon. We waited twelve hours, and were about to go, leaving a mark behind us to show we had been there, when we saw the rouseabout and his exhausted horse coming slowly through the bluebush to us. He had suffered much for want of water.

We all started back again at different angles, our final rendezvous being arranged for the station homestead, the rouseabout taking a direct line, and making for the Little Black Billabong on the way. I saw no sign of the adventurers. I sickened with the heat, and my eyes became inflamed. I was glad enough when, at last, I drew rein in the home paddock. I couldn't see any distance, though I was not far from the house. But when I got into the garden I saw that others had just arrived. It was the rouseabout with my wife's lovers. He had found Billy nursing Eversofar in the shade of a stunted brigalow, while Bingong was away hunting for water. Billy himself had pushed his cause as bravely as possible, and had in fact visited the Little Black Billabong, where—he always maintains—he had seen the great Bunyip. But after watching one night, they tried to push on to the Debil-debil Waterhole. Old Eversofar, being weak and old, gave in, and Billy became a little delirious—he has denied it, but Bingong says it is so; yet he pulled himself together as became the leader of an expedition, and did what he could for Eversofar until the rouseabout came with food and water. Then he broke down and cried—he denies this also. They tied the sick man on the horse and trudged back to the station in a bad plight.

As I came near the group I heard my wife say to Billy, who looked sadly haggard and ill, that she was sure he would have got the Bunyip if it hadn't been for the terrible drought; and at that, regardless of my presence, he took her by the arms and kissed her, and then she kissed him several times.

Perhaps I ought to have mentioned before that Billy was just nine years old.

THE STRANGERS' HUT

THE STRANGERS' HUT

I HAD come a long journey across country with Glenn, the squatter, and now we were entering the homestead paddock of his sheep-station, Winnanbar. Afar to the left was a stone building, solitary in a waste of salt-bush and dead-finish scrub. I asked Glenn what it was.

He answered, smilingly: "The Strangers' Hut. Sundowners and that lot sleep there; there's always some flour and tea in a hammock, under the roof, and there they are with a pub of their own. It's a fashion we have in Australia."

"It seems all right, Glenn," I said with admiration. "It's surer than Elijah's ravens."

"It saves us from their prowling about the barracks, and camping on the front veranda."

"How many do you have of a week?"

"That depends. Sundowners are as uncertain as they are unknown quantities. After shearing-time they're thickest; in the dead of summer fewest. This is the dead of summer," and, for the hundredth time in our travel, Glenn shook his head sadly.

Sadness was ill-suited to his burly form and bronzed face; but it was there. He had some trouble, I thought, deeper than drought. It was too introspective to have its origin solely in the fact that sheep were dying by thousands, that the stock-routes were as dry of water as the hard sky above us, and that it was a toss-up whether many families in the West should not presently

abandon their stations, driven out by a water-famine—and worse.

After a short silence Glenn stood up in the trap, and, following the circle of the horizon with his hand, said: "There's not an honest blade of grass in all this wretched West. This whole business is gambling with God."

"It is hard on women and children that they must live here," I remarked, with my eyes on the Strangers' Hut.

"It's harder for men without them," he mournfully replied; and at that moment I began to doubt whether Glenn, whom I had heard to be a bachelor, was not tired of that calm but chilly state. He followed up this speech immediately by this: "Look at that drinking-tank!"

The thing was not pleasant in the eye. Sheep were dying and dead by thousands round it, and the crows were feasting horribly. We became silent again.

The Strangers' Hut, and its unique and, to me, awe-some hospitality, was still in my mind. It remained with me until, impelled by curiosity, I wandered away towards it in the glow and silence of the evening. The walk was no brief matter, but at length I stood near the lonely public, where no name of guest is ever asked, and no bill ever paid. And then I fell to musing on how many life-histories these grey walls had sheltered for a fitful hour, how many stumbling wayfarers had eaten and drunken in this Hotel of Refuge. I dropped my glances on the ground; a bird, newly dead, lay at my feet, killed by the heat.

At that moment I heard a child's crying. I started forward, then faltered. Why, I could not tell, save that the crying seemed so a part of the landscape that

it might have come out of the sickly sunset, out of the yellow sky, out of the aching earth about me. To follow it might be like pursuing dreams. The crying ceased.

Thus for a moment, and then I walked round to the door of the hut. At the sound of slight moaning I paused again. Then I crossed the threshold resolutely.

A woman with a child in her arms sat on a rude couch. Her lips were clinging to the infant's forehead. At the sound of my footsteps she raised her head.

"Ah!" she said, and, trembling, rose to her feet. She was fair-haired and strong, if sad, of face. Perhaps she never had been beautiful, but in health her face must have been persistent in its charm. Even now it was something noble.

With that patronage of compassion which we use towards those who are unfortunate and humble, I was about to say to her, "My poor woman!" but there was something in her manner so above her rude surroundings that I was impelled to this instead: "Madam, you are ill. Can I be of service to you?"

Then I doffed my hat. I had not done so before, and I blushed now as I did it, for I saw that she had compelled me. She sank back upon the couch again as though the effort to achieve my courtesy had unnerved her, and she murmured simply and painfully: "Thank you very much: I have travelled far."

"May I ask how far?"

"From Mount o' Eden, two hundred miles and more, I think"; and her eyes sought the child's face, while her cheek grew paler. She had lighted a tiny fire on the hearthstone and had put the kettle on the wood. Her eyes were upon it now with the covetousness of thirst and hunger. I kneeled, and put in the tin of water left

behind by some other pilgrim, a handful of tea from the same source—the outcast and suffering giving to their kind. I poured out for her soon a little of the tea. Then I asked for her burden. She gave it to my arms—a wan, wise-faced child.

"Madam," I said, "I am only a visitor here, but, if you feel able, and will come with me to the homestead, you shall, I know, find welcome and kindness, or, if you will wait, there are horses, and you shall be brought —yes, indeed," I added, as she shook her head in sad negation, "you will be welcome."

I was sure that, whatever ill chances had befallen the mother of this child, she was one of those who are found in the sight of the Perfect Justice sworn for by the angels. I knew also that Glenn would see that she should be cordially sheltered and brought back to health; for men like Glenn, I said to myself, are kinder in their thought of suffering women than women themselves—are kinder, juster, and less prone to think evil.

She raised her head, and answered: "I think that I could walk; but this, you see, is the only hospitality that I can accept, save, it may be, some bread and a little meat, that the child suffer no more, until I reach Winnanbar, which, I fear, is still far away."

"This," I replied, "is Winnanbar; the homestead is over there, beyond the hill."

"This is—Winnanbar?" she whisperingly said, "this —is—Winnanbar! I did not think—I was—so near." . . . A thankful look came to her face. She rose, and took the child again and pressed it to her breast, and her eyes brooded upon it. "Now she is beautiful," I thought, and waited for her to speak.

"Sir—" she said at last, and paused. In the silence

a footstep sounded without, and then a form appeared in the doorway. It was Glenn.

"I followed you," he said to me; "and—!" He saw the woman, and a low cry broke from her.

"Agnes! Agnes!" he cried, with something of sternness and a little shame.

"I have come—to you—again—Robert," she brokenly, but not abjectly, said.

He came close to her and looked into her face, then into the face of the child, with a sharp questioning. She did not flinch, but answered his scrutiny clearly and proudly. Then, after a moment, she turned a disappointed look upon me, as though to say that I, a stranger, had read her aright at once, while this man held her afar in the cold courts of his judgment ere he gave her any welcome or said a word of pity.

She sank back on the bench, and drew a hand with sorrowful slowness across her brow. He saw a ring upon her finger. He took her hand and said: "You are married, Agnes?"

"My husband is dead, and the sister of this poor one also," she replied; and she fondled the child and raised her eyes to her brother's.

His face now showed compassion. He stooped and kissed her cheek. And it seemed to me at that moment that she could not be gladder than I.

"Agnes," he said, "can you forgive me?"

"He was only a stock-rider," she murmured, as if to herself, "but he was well-born. I loved him. You were angry. I went away with him in the night . . . far away to the north. God was good—" Here she brushed her lips tenderly across the curls of the child. "Then the drought came and sickness fell and . . . death . . . and I was alone with my baby—"

His lips trembled and his hand was hurting my arm, though he knew it not.

"Where could I go?" she continued.

Glenn answered pleadingly now: "To your unworthy brother, God bless you and forgive me, dear!—though even here at Winnanbar there is drought and famine and the cattle die."

"But my little one shall live!" she cried joyfully.

That night Glenn of Winnanbar was a happy man, for rain fell on the land, and he held his sister's child in his arms.

THE PLANTER'S WIFE

THE PLANTER'S WIFE

She was the daughter of a ruined squatter, whose family had been pursued with bad luck; he was a planter, named Houghton. She was not an uncommon woman; he was not an unusual man. They were not happy, they might never be; he was almost sure they would not be; she had long ceased to think they could be. She had told him when she married him that she did not love him. He had been willing to wait for her love, believing that by patience and devotion he could win it. They were both sorry for each other now. They accepted things as they were, but they knew there was danger in the situation. She loved some one else, and he knew it, but he had never spoken to her of it—he was of too good stuff for that. He was big and burly, and something awkward in his ways. She was pretty, clear-minded, kind, and very grave. There were days when they were both bitter at heart. On one such day they sat at luncheon, eating little, and looking much out of the door across the rice fields and banana plantations to the Hebron Mountains. The wife's eyes fixed on the hills and stayed. A road ran down the hill towards a platform of rock which swept smooth and straight to the sheer side of the mountain called White Bluff. At first glance it seemed that the road ended at the cliff—a mighty slide to destruction. Instead, however, of coming straight to the cliff it veered suddenly, and ran round the mountain side, coming down at a steep but fairly safe incline. The

platform or cliff was fenced off by a low barricade of fallen trees, scarcely noticeable from the valley below.

The wife's eyes had often wandered to the spot with a strange fascination, as now. Her husband looked at her meditatively. He nodded slightly, as though to himself. She looked up. Their understanding of each other's thoughts was singular.

"Tom," she said, "I will ride the chestnut, Bowline, to that fence some day. It will be a big steeplechase."

He winced, but answered slowly. "You have meant to say that for a long time past. I am glad it has been said at last."

She was struck by the perfect quietness of his tone. Her eyes sought his face and rested for a moment, half bewildered, half pitying.

"Yes, it has been in my mind often—often," she said.

"It's a horrible thought," he gravely replied; "but it is better to be frank. Still, you'll never do it, Alice—you'll never dare to do it."

"Dare, dare," she answered, springing to her feet, and a shuddering sigh broke from her. "The thing itself is easy enough, Tom."

"And why haven't you done it?" he asked in a hard voice, but still calmly.

She leaned one hand upon the table, the other lay at her cheek, and her head bent forward at him. "Because," she answered, "because I have tried to be thoughtful for you."

"Oh, as to that," he said—"as to that!" and he shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"You don't care a straw," she said sharply, "you never did."

He looked up suddenly at her, a great bitterness in his face, and laughed strangely, as he answered: "Care!

Good God! Care! . . . What's the use of caring? It's been all a mistake; all wrong."

"That is no news," she said wearily. "You discovered that long ago."

He looked out of the door across the warm fields again; he lifted his eyes to that mountain road; he looked down at her. "I haven't any hope left now, Alice. Let's be plain with each other. We've always been plain, but let us be plainer still. There are those rice fields out there, that banana plantation, and the sugar-cane stretching back as far as the valley goes—it's all mine, all mine. I worked hard for it. I had only one wish with it all, one hope through it all, and it was, that when I brought you here as my wife, you would come to love me—some time. Well, I've waited, and waited. It hasn't come. We're as far apart to-day as we were the day I married you. Farther, for I had hope then, but I've no hope now, none at all."

They both turned towards the intemperate sunlight and the great hill. The hollowness of life as they lived it came home to them with an aching force. Yet she lifted her fan from the table and fanned herself gently with it, and he mechanically lit a cigar. Servants passed in and out removing the things from the table. Presently they were left alone. The heavy breath of the palm trees floated in upon them; the fruit of the passion-flower hung temptingly at the window; they could hear the sound of a torrent just behind the house. The day was droning luxuriously, yet the eyes of both, as by some weird influence, were fastened upon the hill; and presently they saw, at the highest point where the road was visible, a horseman. He came slowly down until he reached the spot where the road was barricaded from the platform of the cliff. Here he paused. He

sat long, looking, as it appeared, down into the valley. The husband rose and took down a field-glass from a shelf; he levelled it at the figure.

"Strange, strange," he said to himself; "he seems familiar, and yet—"

She rose and reached out her hand for the glass. He gave it to her. She raised it to her eyes, but, at that moment, the horseman swerved into the road again, and was lost to view. Suddenly Houghton started; an enigmatical smile passed across his face.

"Alice," said he, "did you mean what you said about the steeplechase—I mean about the ride down the White Bluff road?"

"I meant all I said," was her bitter reply.

"You think life is a mistake?" he rejoined.

"I think *we* have made a mistake," was her answer; "a deadly mistake, and it lasts all our lives."

He walked to the door, trained the glass again on the hill, then afterwards turned round, and said:

"If ever you think of riding the White Bluff road—straight for the cliff itself and over—tell me, and I'll ride it with you. If it's all wrong as it is, it's all wrong for both, and, maybe, the worst of what comes after is better than the worst of what is here."

They had been frank with each other in the past, but never so frank as this. He was determined that they should be still more frank; and so was she. "Alice," he said—

"Wait a minute," she interjected. "I have something to say, Tom. I never told you—indeed, I thought I never should tell you; but now I think it's best to do so. I loved a man once—with all my soul."

"You love him still," was the reply; and he screwed and unscrewed the field-glass in his hand, looking

bluntly at her the while. She nodded, returning his gaze most earnestly and choking back a sob.

"Well, it's a pity, it's a pity," he replied. "We oughtn't to live together as it is. It's all wrong; it's wicked—I can see that now."

"You are not angry with me?" she answered in surprise.

"You can't help it, I suppose," he answered drearily.

"Do you really mean," she breathlessly said, "that we might as well die together, since we can't live together and be happy?"

"There's nothing in life that gives me a pleasant taste in the mouth, so what's the good? Mind you, my girl, I think it a terrible pity that you should have the thought to die; and if you could be happy living, I'd die myself to save you. But can you? That's the question—can you be happy, even if I went and you stayed?"

"I don't think so," she said thoughtfully, and without excitement. "No, I don't think so."

"The man's name was Cayley—Cayley," he said to her bluntly.

"How did you know?" she asked, astonished. "You never saw him."

"Oh, yes, I've seen him," was the reply—"seen him often. I knew him once."

"I do not understand you," she rejoined.

"I knew it all along," he continued, "and I've waited for you to tell me."

"How did you know?"

"Cayley told me."

"When did he tell you?"

"The morning that I married you." His voice was thick with misery.

She became white and dazed. "Before—or after?" she asked. He paused a moment, looking steadily at her, and answered, "Before."

She drew back as though she had been struck. "Good God!" she cried. "Why did he not—" she paused.

"Why did he not marry you himself?" he rejoined. "You must ask him that yourself, if you do not know."

"And yet you married me, knowing all—that he loved me," she gasped.

"I would have married you then, knowing a thousand times that."

She cowered, but presently advanced to him. "You have sinned as much as I," she said. "Do you dare pay the penalty?"

"Do I dare ride with you to the cliff—and beyond?"

Her lips framed a reply, but no sound came.

"But we will wait till to-morrow," he said absently.

"Why not to-day?" she painfully asked.

"We will wait till to-morrow," he urged, and his eyes followed the trail of a horseman on the hill.

"Why not while we have courage?" she persisted, as though the suspense hurt her.

"But we will wait till to-morrow, Alice," he again repeated.

"Very well," she answered, with the indifference of despair.

He stood in the doorway and watched a horseman descending into valley.

"Strange things may chance before to-morrow," he said to himself, and he mechanically lighted another cigar. She idled with her fan.

II

He did not leave the house that afternoon. He kept his post on the veranda, watching the valley. With an iron kind of calmness he was facing a strange event. It was full of the element of chance, and he had been taking chances all his life. With the chances of fortune he had won; with the chances of love and happiness he had lost. He knew that the horseman on the mountain-side was Cayley; he knew that Cayley would not be near his home without a purpose. Besides, Cayley had said he would come—he had said it in half banter, half threat. Houghton had had too many experiences backward and forward in the world, to be afflicted with littleness of mind. He had never looked to get an immense amount of happiness out of life, but he thought that love and marriage would give him a possible approach to content. He had chanced it, and he had lost. At first he had taken it with a dreadful bitterness; now he regarded it with a quiet, unimpassioned despair. He regarded his wife, himself, and Cayley, as an impartial judge would view the extraordinary claims of three desperate litigants. He thought it all over as he sat there smoking. When the servants came to him to ask him questions or his men ventured upon matters of business, he answered them directly, decisively, and went on thinking. His wife had come to take coffee with him at the usual hour of the afternoon. There was no special strain of manner or of speech. The voices were a little lower, the tones a little more decided, their eyes did not meet; that was all. When coffee-drinking was over the wife retired to her room. Still Houghton smoked on. At length he saw the horseman entering into the

grove of palms before the door. He rose deliberately from his seat and walked down the pathway.

"Good day to you, Houghton," the horseman said; "we meet again, you see."

"I see."

"You are not overjoyed."

"There's no reason why I should be glad. Why have you come?"

"You remember our last meeting five years ago. You were on your way to be married. Marriage is a beautiful thing, Houghton, when everything is right and square, and there's love both sides. Well, everything was right and square with you and the woman you were going to marry; but there was not love both sides."

While they had been talking thus, Houghton had, of purpose, led his companion far into the shade of the palms. He now wheeled upon Cayley, and said sternly: "I warn you to speak with less insolence; we had better talk simply."

Cayley was perfectly cool. "We will talk simply. As I said, you had marriage without love. The woman loved another man. That other man loved the woman —that good woman. In youthful days at college he had married, neither wisely nor well, a beggar-maid without those virtues usually credited to beggar-maidens who marry gentlemen. Well, Houghton, the beggar-maid was supposed to have died. She hadn't died; she had shammed. Meanwhile, between her death and her resurrection, the man came to love that good woman. And so, lines got crossed; things went wrong. Houghton, I loved Alice before she was your wife. I should have married her but for the beggar-maid."

"You left her without telling her why."

"I told her that things must end, and I went away."

"Like a coward," rejoined Houghton. "You should have told her *all*."

"What difference has it made?" asked Cayley gloomily.

"My happiness and hers. If you had told her all, there had been an end of mystery. Mystery is dear to a woman's heart. She was not different in that respect from others. You took the surest way to be remembered."

Cayley's fingers played with his horse's mane; his eyes ran over the ground debatingly; then he lifted them suddenly, and said: "Houghton, you are remarkably frank with me; what do you mean by it?"

"I'll tell you if you will answer me this question: Why have you come here?"

The eyes of both men crossed like swords, played with each other for a moment, and then fixed to absolute determination. Cayley answered doggedly: "I came to see your wife, because I'm not likely ever to see her or you again. I wanted one look of her before I went away. There, I'm open with you."

"It is well to be open with me," Houghton replied. He drew Cayley aside to an opening in the trees, where the mountain and the White Bluff road could be seen, and pointed. "That would make a wonderful leap," he said, "from the top of the hill down to the cliff edge—and over!"

"A dreadful steeplechase," said Cayley.

Houghton lowered his voice. "Two people have agreed to take that fence."

Cayley frowned. "What two people?"

"My wife and I."

"Why?"

"Because there has been a mistake, and to live is misery."

"Has it come to that?" Cayley asked huskily. "Is there no way—no better way? Are you sure that Death mends things?" Presently he put his hand upon Houghton's arm, as if with a sudden, keen resolve. "Houghton," he said, "you are a man—I have become a villain. A woman sent me once on the high road to the devil; then an angel came in and made a man of me again; but I lost the angel, and another man found her, and I took the highway with the devil again. I was born a gentleman—that you know. Now I am . . ." He hesitated. A sardonic smile crept across his face.

"Yes, you are—?" interposed Houghton.

"I am—a man who will give you your wife's love."

"I do not understand," Houghton responded.

Cayley drew Houghton back from where they stood and away from the horse.

"Look at that horse," he said. "Did you ever see a better?"

"Never," answered Houghton, running him over with his eye, "never."

"You notice the two white feet and the star on the forehead. Now, listen. Firefoot, here!"

"My God!" said Houghton, turning upon him with staring eyes, "you are—"

"Whose horse is that?" interjected Cayley.

Firefoot laid his head upon Cayley's shoulder. Houghton looked at them both for a moment. "It is the horse of Hyland the bushranger," he said. "All Queensland knows Firefoot." Then he dazedly added: "Are you Hyland?"

"A price is set on my head," the bushranger answered with a grim smile.

Houghton stood silent for a moment, breathing hard. Then he rejoined: "You are bold to come here openly."

"If I couldn't come here openly I would not come at all," answered the other. "After what I have told you," he added, "will you take me in and let me speak with your wife?"

Houghton's face turned black, and he was about to answer angrily, but Cayley said: "On my honour—I will play a fair game," he said.

For an instant their eyes were fixed on each other; then, with a gesture for Cayley to follow, Houghton went towards the house.

III

Five minutes later Houghton said to his wife: "Alice, a stranger has come."

"Who is it?" she asked breathlessly, for she read importance in his tone.

"It is the horseman we saw on the hillside." His eyes passed over her face pityingly. "I will go and bring him."

She caught his arm. "Who is it? Is it any one I know?"

"It is some one you know," he answered, and left the room. Bewildered, anticipating, yet dreading to recognise her thoughts, she sat down and waited in a painful stillness.

Presently the door opened, and Cayley entered. She started to her feet with a stifled, bitter cry: "Oh, Harry!"

He hurried to her with arms outstretched, for she

swayed; but she straightway recovered herself, and, leaning against a chair, steadied to his look.

"Why have you come here?" she whispered.

"To say good-bye for always," was his reply.

"And why—for always?" She was very white and quiet.

"Because we are not likely ever to meet again."

"Where are you going?" she anxiously asked.

"God knows!"

Strange sensations were working in her. What would be the end of this? Her husband, knowing all, had permitted this man to come to her alone. She had loved him for years; though he had deserted her years ago, she loved him still—*did* she love him still?

"Will you not sit down?" she said with mechanical courtesy.

A stranger would not have thought from their manner that there were lives at stake. They both sat, he playing with the leaves of an orchid, she opening and shutting her fan absently. But she was so cold she could hardly speak. Her heart seemed to stand still.

"How has the world used you since we met last?" she tried to say neutrally.

"Better, I fear, than I have used it," he answered quietly.

"I do not quite see. How could you ill-use the world?" There was faint irony in her voice now. A change seemed to have come upon her.

"By ill-using any one person we ill-use society—the world"—he meaningly replied.

"Whom have you ill-used?" She did not look at him.

"Many—you chiefly."

"How have you—most—ill-used me?"

"By letting you think well of me—you have done so, have you not?"

She did not speak, but lowered her head, and caught her breath slightly. There was a silence. Then she said: "There was no reason why I should— But you must not say these things to me. My husband—"

"Your husband knows all."

"But that does not alter it," she urged firmly. "Though he may be willing you should speak of these things, I am not."

"Your husband is a good fellow," he rejoined. "I am not."

"You are not?" she asked wearily.

"No. What do you think was the reason that, years ago, I said we could never be married, and that we must forget each other?"

"I cannot tell. I supposed it was some duty of which I could not know. There are secret and sacred duties which we sometimes do not tell, even to our nearest and dearest . . . but I said we should not speak of these things, and we must not." She rose to her feet. "My husband is somewhere near. I will call him. There are so many things that men can talk of—pleasant and agreeable things—"

He had risen with her, and as her hand was stretched out to ring, stayed it. "No, never mind your husband just now. I think he knows what I am going to say to you."

"But, oh, you must not—must not!" she urged.

"Pardon me, but I must," was his reply. "As I said, you thought I was a good fellow. Well, I am not; not at all. I will tell you why I left you. I was—already married."

He let the bare unrelieved fact face her, and shock her.

"You were—already married—when—you loved me," she said, her face showing misery and shame.

He smiled a little bitterly when he saw the effect of his words, but said clearly: "Yes. You see I was a villain."

She shuddered a little, and then said simply: "Your face was not the face of a bad man. Are you telling me the truth?"

He nodded.

"Then you were wicked with me," she said at last, with a great sigh, looking him straight in the eyes. "But you—you loved me?" she said with injured pride and a piteous appeal in her voice. "Ah, I know you loved me!"

"I will tell you when you know all," he answered evenly.

"Is there more to tell?" she asked heavily, and shrinking from him now.

"Much more. Please, come here." He went towards the open window of the room, and she followed. He pointed out to where his horse stood in the palms. "That is my horse," he said. He whistled to the horse, which pricked up its ears and trotted over to the window. "The name of my horse," he said, "may be familiar to you. He is called Firefoot."

"Firefoot!" she answered dazedly, "that is the name of Hyland's horse—Hyland the bushranger."

"This is Hyland's horse," he said, and he patted the animal's neck gently as it thrust its head within the window.

"But you said it was your horse," she rejoined slowly, as though the thing perplexed her sorely.

"It is Hyland's horse; it is my horse," he urged without looking at her. His courage wellnigh failed him. Villain as he was, he loved her, and he saw the foundations of her love for him crumbling away before him. In all his criminal adventures he had cherished this one thing.

She suddenly gave a cry of shame and agony, a low trembling cry, as though her heart-strings were being dragged out. She drew back from him—back to the middle of the room.

He came towards her, reaching out his arms. "Forgive me," he said.

"Oh, no, never!" she cried with horror.

The cry had been heard outside, and Houghton entered the room, to find his wife, all her strength gone, turning a face of horror upon Cayley. She stretched out her arms to her husband with a pitiful cry. "Tom," she said, "Tom, take me away."

He took her gently in his arms.

Cayley stood with his hand upon his horse's neck.

"Houghton," he said in a low voice, "I have been telling your wife what I was, and who I am. She is shocked. I had better go."

The woman's head had dropped on her husband's shoulder. Houghton waited to see if she would look up. But she did not.

"Well, good-bye to you both," Cayley said, stepped through the window, and vaulted on his horse's back. "I'm going to see if the devil's as black as he's painted." Then, setting spurs to his horse, he galloped away through the palms to the gate.

A year later Hyland the bushranger was shot in a struggle with the mounted police sent to capture him.

The planter's wife read of it in England, whither she had gone on a visit.

"It is better so," she said to herself, calmly. "And he wished it, I am sure."

For now she knew the whole truth, and she did not love her husband less—but more.

BARBARA GOLDING

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The last time John Osgood saw Barbara Golding was on a certain summer afternoon at the lonely Post, Telegraph, and Customs Station known as Rahway, on the Queensland coast. It was at Rahway also that he first and last saw Mr. Louis Bachelor. He had had excellent opportunities for knowing Barbara Golding; for many years she had been governess (and something more) to his sisters Janet, Agnes and Lorna. She had been engaged in Sydney as governess simply, but Wandenong cattle station was far up country, and she gradually came to perform the functions of milliner and dressmaker, encouraged thereto by the family for her unerring taste and skill. Her salary, however, had been proportionately increased, and it did not decline when her office as governess became practically a sinecure as her pupils passed beyond the sphere of the schoolroom. Perhaps George Osgood, father of John Osgood, and owner of Wandenong, did not make an allowance to Barbara Golding for her services as counsellor and confidant of his family; but neither did he subtract anything from her earnings in those infrequent years when she journeyed alone to Sydney on those mysterious visits which so mightily puzzled the good people of Wandenong. The boldest and most off-hand of them, however, could never discover what Barbara Golding did not choose to tell. She was slight, almost frail in form, and very gentle of manner; but she also possessed that rare species of courtesy which, never declining to fastidiousness nor lapsing into familiarity, checked all

curious intrusion, was it ever so insinuating; and the milliner and dressmaker was not less self-poised and compelling of respect than the governess and confidant.

In some particulars the case of Louis Bachelor was similar. Besides being the Post, Telegraph, and Customs Officer, and Justice of the Peace at Rahway, he was available and valuable to the Government as a meteorologist. The Administration recognised this after a few years of voluntary and earnest labour on Louis Bachelor's part. It was not, however, his predictions concerning floods or droughts that roused this official appreciation, but the fulfilment of those predictions. At length a yearly *honorarium* was sent to him, and then again, after a dignified delay, there was forwarded to him a suggestion from the Cabinet that he should come to Brisbane and take a more important position. It was when this patronage was declined that the Premier (dropping for a moment into that bushman's jargon which came naturally to him) said, irritably, that Louis Bachelor was a "—— old fossil who didn't know when he'd got his dover in the dough," which, being interpreted into the slang of the old world, means, his knife into the official loaf. But the fossil went on as before, known by name to the merest handful of people in the colony, though they all profited, directly or indirectly, by his scientific services. He was as unknown to the dwellers at Wandenong as they were to him, or he again to the citizens of the moon.

It was the custom for Janet and Agnes Osgood to say that Barbara Golding had a history. On every occasion the sentiment was uttered with that fresh conviction in tone which made it appear to be born again. It seemed to have especially pregnant force one evening after Janet had been consulting Barbara on the

mysteries of the garment in which she was to be married to Druce Stephens, part owner of Booldal Station.

"Aggie," remarked the coming bride, "Barbara's face flushed up ever so pink when I said to her that she seemed to know exactly what a *trousseau* ought to be. I wonder! She is well-bred enough to have been anybody; and the Bishop of Adelaide recommended her, you know."

Soon after this Druce Stephens arrived at Wandenong and occupied the attention of Janet until supper-time, when he startled the company by the tale of his adventures on the previous evening with Roadmaster, the mysterious bushranger, whose name was now in every man's mouth; who apparently worked with no confederates—a perilous proceeding, though it reduced the chances of betrayal. Druce was about to camp on the plains for the night, in preference to riding on to a miserable bush-tavern a few miles away, when he was suddenly accosted in the scrub by a gallant-looking fellow on horseback, who, from behind his mask, asked him to give up what money he had about him, together with his watch and ring. The request was emphasised by the presence of a revolver held at an easy but suggestive angle. The disadvantage to the squatter was obvious. He merely asked that he should be permitted to keep the ring, as it had many associations, remarking at the same time that he would be pleased to give an equivalent for it if the bushranger would come to Wandenong. At the mention of Wandenong the highwayman asked his name. On being told, he handed back the money, the watch, and the ring, and politely requested a cigar, saying that the Osgoods merited consideration at his hands, and that their friends were safe from molestation. Then he added, with some grim hu-

mour, that if Druce had no objection to spending an hour with Roadmaster over a fire and a billy of tea, he would be glad of his company; for bushranging, according to his system, was but dull work. The young squatter consented, and together they sat for two hours, the highwayman, however, never removing his mask. They talked of many things, and at last Druce ventured to ask his companion about the death of Blood Finchley, the owner of Tarawan sheep-run. At this Roadmaster became weary, and rose to leave; but as if on second thought, he said that Finchley's companion, whom he allowed to go unrobbed and untouched, was both a coward and a liar; that the slain man had fired thrice needlessly, and had wounded him in the neck (the scar of which he showed) before he drew trigger. Druce then told him that besides a *posse* of police, a number of squatters and bushmen had banded to hunt him down, and advised him to make for the coast if he could, and leave the country. At this Roadmaster laughed, and said that his fancy was not sea-ward yet, though that might come; and then, with a courteous wave of his hand, he jumped on his horse and rode away.

The Osgoods speculated curiously and futilely on Roadmaster's identity, as indeed the whole colony had done. And here it may be said that people of any observation (though, of necessity, they were few, since Rahway attracted only busy sugar-planters and their workmen) were used to speak of Louis Bachelor as one who must certainly have a history. The person most likely to have the power of inquisition into his affairs was his faithful aboriginal servant, Gongi. But records and history were only understood by Gongi when they were restricted to the number of heads taken in tribal battle. At the same time he was a devoted slave to

the man who, at the risk of his own life, had rescued him from the murderous spears of his aboriginal foes. That was a kind of record within Gongi's comprehension, from the contemplation of which he turned to speak of Louis Bachelor as "That fellow budgery marmi b'longin' to me," which, in civilised language, means "my good master." Gongi often dilated on this rescue, and he would, for purposes of illustration, take down from his master's wall an artillery officer's sabre and show how his assailants had been dispersed.

From the presence of this sword it was not unreasonably assumed that Louis Bachelor had at some time been in the army. He was not, however, communicative on this point, though he shrewdly commented on European wars and rumours of wars when they occurred. He also held strenuous opinions of the conduct of Government and the suppression of public evils, based obviously upon military views of things. For bushrangers he would have a modern Tyburn, but this and other tragic suggestions lacked conviction when confronted with his verdicts given as Justice of the Peace. He pronounced judgments in a grand and airy fashion, but as if he were speaking by a card, the Don Quixote whose mercy would be vaster than his wrath. This was the impression he gave to John Osgood on the day when the young squatter introduced himself to Rahway, where he had come on a mission to its one official. The young man's father had a taste for many things; astronomy was his latest, and he had bought from the Government a telescope which, excellent in its day, had been superseded by others of later official purchase. He had brought it to Wandenong, had built a home for it, and had got it into trouble. He had then sent to Brisbane for assistance, and the astronomer of

the Government had referred him to the postmaster at Rahway, "Prognosticator" of the meteorological column in *The Courier*, who would be instructed to give Mr. Osgood every help, especially as the occultation of Venus was near. Men do not send letters by post in a new country when personal communication is possible, and John Osgood was asked by his father to go to Rahway. When John wished for the name of this rare official, the astronomer's letter was handed over with a sarcastic request that the name might be deciphered; but the son was not more of an antiquary than his father, and he had to leave without it. He rode to the coast, and there took a passing steamer to Rahway.

From the sea Rahway looked a tropical paradise. The bright green palisades of mangrove on the right crowded down to the water's edge; on the left was the luxuriance of a tropical jungle; in the centre was an arc of opal shore fringed with cocoa-palms, and beyond the sea a handful of white dwellings. Behind was a sweeping monotony of verdure stretching back into the great valley of the Popri, and over all the heavy languor of the South.

But the beauty was a delusion. When John Osgood's small boat swept up the sands on the white crest of a league-long roller, how different was the scene! He saw a group of dilapidated huts, a tavern called *The Angel's Rest*, a blackfellow's hut, and the bareness of three Government offices, all built on piles, that the white ants should not humble them suddenly to the dust; a fever-making mangrove swamp, black at the base as the filthiest moat, and tenanted by reptiles; feeble palms, and a sickly breath creeping from the jungle to mingle with the heavy scent of the last consignment of sugar from the Popri valley. It brought him to a mel-

ancholy standstill, disturbed at last by Gongi touching him on the arm and pointing towards the post-office. His language to Gongi was strong; he called the place by names that were not polite; and even on the threshold of the official domain said that the Devil would have his last big muster there. But from that instant his glibness declined. The squatters are the aristocracy of Australia, and rural postmasters are not always considered eligible for a dinner-party at Government House; but when Louis Bachelor came forward to meet his visitor the young fellow's fingers quickly caught his hat from his head, and an off-hand greeting became a respectful salute.

At first the young man was awed by the presence of the grizzled gentleman, and he struggled with his language to bring it up to the classic level of the old meteorologist's speech. Before they had spoken a dozen words John Osgood said to himself: "What a quaint team he and the Maid of Honour would make! It's the same kind of thing in both, with the difference of sex and circumstance." The nature of his visitor's business pleased the old man, and infused his courtesy with warmth. Yes, he would go to Wandenong with pleasure; the Government had communicated with him about it; a substitute had been offered; he was quite willing to take his first leave in four years; astronomy was a great subject, he had a very good and obedient telescope of his own, though not nearly so large as that at Wandenong; he would telegraph at once to Brisbane for the substitute to be sent on the following day, and would be ready to start in twenty-four hours. After visiting Wandenong he would go to Brisbane for some scientific necessaries—and so on through smooth parentheses of talk. Under all the bluntness of the Bush

young Osgood had a refinement which now found expression in an attempt to make himself agreeable—not a difficult task, since, thanks to his father's tastes and a year or two at college, he had a smattering of physical science. He soon won his way to the old man's heart, and to his laboratory, which had been developed through years of patience and ingenious toil in this desolate spot.

Left alone that evening in Louis Bachelor's sitting-room, John Osgood's eyes were caught by a portrait on the wall, the likeness of a beautiful girl. Something about the face puzzled him. Where had he seen it? More than a little of an artist, he began to reproduce the head on paper. He put it in different poses; he added to it; he took away from it; he gave it a child's face, preserving the one striking expression; he made it that of a woman—of an elderly, grave woman. Why, what was this? Barbara Golding! He would not spoil the development of the drama, of which he now held the fluttering prologue, by any blunt treatment; he would touch this and that nerve gently to see what past connection there was between

"These dim blown birds beneath an alien sky."

He mooned along in this fashion, a fashion in which his bushmen friends would not have known him, until his host entered. Then, in that auspicious moment when his own pipe and his companion's cigarette were being lighted, he said: "I've been amusing myself with drawing since you left, sir, and I've produced this," handing over the paper.

Louis Bachelor took the sketch, and, walking to the window for better light, said: "Believe me, I have a

profound respect for the artistic talent. I myself once had—ah!" He sharply paused as he saw the pencilled head, and stood looking fixedly at it. Presently he turned slowly, came to the portrait on the wall, and compared it with that in his hand. Then, with a troubled face, he said: "You have much talent, but it is—it is too old—much too old—and very sorrowful."

"I intended the face to show age and sorrow, Mr. Bachelor. Would not the original of that have both?"

"She had sorrow—she had sorrow, but," and he looked sadly at the sketch again, "it is too old for her. Her face was very young—always very young."

"But has she not sorrow *now*, sir?" the other persisted gently.

The grey head was shaken sadly, and the unsteady voice meditatively murmured: "Such beauty, such presence! I was but five-and-thirty then." There was a slight pause, and then, with his hand touching the young man's shoulder, Louis Bachelor continued: "You are young; you have a good heart; I know men. You have the sympathy of the artist—why should I not speak to you? I have been silent about it so long. You have brought the past back, I know not how, so vividly! I dream here, I work here; men come with merchandise and go again; they only bind my tongue; I am not of them: but you are different, as it seems to me, and young. God gave me a happy youth. My eyes were bright as yours, my heart as fond. You love—is it not so? Ah, you smile and blush like an honest man. Well, so much the more I can speak now. God gave me then strength and honour and love—blessed be His name! And then He visited me with sorrow, and, if I still mourn, I have peace, too, and a busy life." Here he looked at the sketch again.

"Then I was a soldier. *She* was my world. Ah, true, love is a great thing—a great thing! She had a brother. They two with their mother were alone in the world, and we were to be married. One day at Gibraltar I received a letter from her saying that our marriage could not be; that she was going away from England; that those lines were her farewell; and that she commended me to the love of Heaven. Such a letter it was—so saintly, so unhappy, so mysterious! When I could get leave I went to England. She—they—had gone, and none knew whither; or, if any of her friends knew, none would speak. I searched for her everywhere. At last I came to Australia, and I am here, no longer searching, but waiting, for there is that above us!" His lips moved as if in prayer. "And this is all I have left of her, except memory," he said, tenderly touching the portrait.

Warmly, yet with discreet sympathy, the young man rejoined: "Sir, I respect, and I hope I understand, your confidence." Then, a little nervously: "Might I ask her name?"

The reply was spoken to the portrait: "Barbara—Barbara Golding."

With Louis Bachelor the young squatter approached Wandenong homestead in some excitement. He had said no word to his companion about that Barbara Golding who played such a gracious part in the home of the Osgoods. He had arranged the movement of the story to his fancy, but would it occur in all as he hoped? With an amiability that was almost malicious in its adroit suggestiveness, though, to be sure, it was honest, he had induced the soldier to talk of his past. His words naturally, and always, radiated to the sun, whose image was now hidden, but for whose memory no

superscription on monument or cenotaph was needed. Now it was a scrap of song, then a tale, and again a verse, by which the old soldier was delicately worked upon, until at last, as they entered the paddocks of Wandenong, stars and telescopes and even Governments had been forgotten in the personal literature of sentiment.

Yet John Osgood was not quite at his ease. Now that it was at hand, he rather shrank from the meeting of these ancient loves. Apart from all else, he knew that no woman's nerves are to be trusted. He hoped fortune would so favour him that he could arrange for the meeting of the two alone, or, at least, in his presence only. He had so far fostered this possibility by arriving at the station at nightfall. What next? He turned and looked at the soldier, a figure out of Hogarth, which even dust and travel left unspoiled. It was certain that the two should meet where John Osgood, squatter and romancer, should be prompter, orchestra, and audience, and he alone. Vain lad!

When they drew rein the young man took his companion at once to his own detached quarters known as the Barracks, and then proceeded to the house. After greetings with his family he sought Barbara Golding, who was in the schoolroom, piously employed, Agnes said, in putting the final touches to Janet's *trousseau*. He went across the square to the schoolroom, and, looking through the window, saw that she was quite alone. A few moments later he stood at the schoolroom door with Louis Bachelor. With his hand on the latch he hesitated. Was it not fairer to give some warning to either? Too late! He opened the door and they entered. She was sewing, and a book lay open beside her, a faded, but stately little figure whose

very garments had an air. She rose, seeing at first only John Osgood, who greeted her and then said: "Miss Golding, I have brought you an old friend."

Then he stepped back and the two were face to face. Barbara Golding's cheeks became pale, but she did not stir; the soldier, with an exclamation of surprise half joyful, half pathetic, took a step forward, and then became motionless also. Their eyes met and stayed intent. This was not quite what the young man had expected. At length the soldier bowed low, and the woman responded gravely. At this point Osgood withdrew to stand guard at the door.

Barbara Golding's eyes were dim with tears. The soldier gently said, "I received—" and then paused. She raised her eyes to his. "I received a letter from you five-and-twenty years ago."

"Yes, five-and-twenty years ago."

"I hope you cannot guess what pain it gave me."

"Yes," she answered faintly, "I can conceive it, from the pain it gave to me."

There was a pause, and then he stepped forward and, holding out his hand, said: "Will you permit me?" He kissed her fingers courteously, and she blushed. "I have waited," he added, "for God to bring this to pass." She shook her head sadly, and her eyes sought his beseechingly, as though he should spare her; but perhaps he could not see that. "You spoke of a great obstacle then; has it been removed?"

"It is still between us," she murmured.

"Is it likely ever to vanish?"

"I—I do not know."

"You can not tell me what it is?"

"Oh, you will not ask me," she pleaded.

He was silent a moment, then spoke. "Might I dare

to hope, Barbara, that you still regard me with—" he hesitated.

The fires of a modest valour fluttered in her cheeks, and she pieced out his sentence: "With all my life's esteem." But she was a woman, and she added: "But I am not young now, and I am very poor."

"Barbara," he said; "I am not rich and I am old; but you, you have not changed; you are beautiful, as you always were."

The moment was crucial. He stepped towards her, but her eyes held him back. He hoped that she would speak, but she only smiled sadly. He waited, but, in the waiting, hope faded, and he only said, at last, in a voice of new resolve grown out of dead expectancy: "Your brother—is he well?"

"I hope so," she somewhat painfully replied.

"Is he in Australia?"

"Yes. I have not seen him for years, but he is here."

As if a thought had suddenly come to him, he stepped nearer, and made as if he would speak; but the words halted on his lips, and he turned away again. She glided to his side and touched his arm. "I am glad that you trust me," she faltered.

"There is no more that need be said," he answered.

And now, woman-like, denying, she pitied, too. "If I ever can, shall—shall I send for you to tell you all?" she murmured.

"You remember I told you that the world had but one place for me, and that was by your side; that where you are, Barbara—"

"Hush, oh hush!" she interrupted gently. "Yes, I remember everything."

"There is no power can alter what is come of Heaven," he said, smiling faintly.

She looked with limpid eyes upon him as he bowed over her hand, and she spoke with a sweet calm: "God be with you, Louis."

Strange as it may seem, John Osgood did not tell his sisters and his family of this romance which he had brought to the vivid close of a first act. He felt—the more so because Louis Bachelor had said no word about it, but had only pressed his hand again and again—that he was somehow put upon his honour, and he thought it a fine thing to stand on a platform of unspoken compact with this gentleman of a social school unfamiliar to him; from which it may be seen that cattle-breeding and bullock-driving need not make a man a boor. What his sisters guessed when they found that Barbara Golding and the visitor were old friends is another matter; but they could not pierce their brother's reserve on the point.

No one at Wandenong saw the parting between the two when Louis Bachelor, his task with the telescope ended, left again for the coast; but indeed it might have been seen by all men, so outwardly formal was it, even as their brief conversations had been since they met again. But is it not known by those who look closely upon the world that there is nothing so tragic as the formal?

John Osgood accompanied his friend to the sea, but the name of Barbara Golding was not mentioned, nor was any reference made to her until the moment of parting. Then the elder man said: "Sir, your consideration and delicacy of feeling have moved me, and touched *her*. We have not been blind to your singular kindness of heart and courtesy, and—God bless you, my friend!"

On his way back to Wandenong, Osgood heard ex-

citing news of Roadmaster. The word had been passed among the squatters who had united to avenge Finchley's death that the bushranger was to be shot on sight, that he should not be left to the uncertainty of the law. The latest exploit of the daring freebooter had been to stop on the plains two members of a Royal Commission of Inquiry. He had relieved them of such money as was in their pockets, and then had caused them to write sumptuous cheques on their banks, payable to bearer. These he had cashed in the very teeth of the law, and actually paused in the street to read a description of himself posted on a telegraph-pole. "Inaccurate, quite inaccurate," he said to a by-stander as he drew his riding-whip slowly along it, and then, mounting his horse, rode leisurely away into the plains. Had he been followed it would have been seen that he directed his course to that point in the horizon where Wandenong lay, and held to it.

It would not perhaps have been pleasant to Agnes Osgood had she known that, as she hummed a song under a she-oak, a mile away from the homestead, a man was watching her from a clump of scrub near by; a man who, however gentlemanly his bearing, had a face where the devil of despair had set his foot, and who carried in his pocket more than one weapon of inhospitable suggestion. But the man intended no harm to her, for, while she sang, something seemed to smooth away the active evil of his countenance, and to dispel a threatening alertness that marked the whole personality.

Three hours later this same man crouched by the drawing-room window of the Wandenong homestead and looked in, listening to the same voice, until Barbara Golding entered the room and took a seat near the piano, with her face turned full towards him. Then he

forgot the music and looked long at the face, and at last rose, and stole silently to where his horse was tied in the scrub. He mounted, and turning towards the house muttered: "A little more of this, and good-bye to my nerves! But it's pleasant to have the taste of it in my mouth for a minute. How would it look in Roadmaster's biography, that a girl just out of school brought the rain to his eyes?" He laughed a little bitterly, and then went on: "Poor Barbara! She mustn't know while I'm alive. Stretch out, my nag; we've a long road to travel to-night."

This was Edward Golding, the brother whom Barbara thought was still in prison at Sydney under another name, serving a term of ten years for manslaughter. If she had read the papers more carefully she would have known that he had been released two years before his time was up. It was eight years since she had seen him. Twice since then she had gone to visit him, but he would not see her. Bad as he had been, his desire was still strong that the family name should not be publicly reviled. At his trial his real name had not been made known; and at his request his sister sent him no letters. Going into gaol a reckless man he came out a constitutional criminal; with the natural instinct for crime greater than the instinct for morality. He turned bushranger for one day, to get money to take him out of the country; but having once entered the lists he left them no more, and, playing at deadly joust with the law, soon became known as Roadmaster, the most noted bushranger since the days of Captain Starlight.

It was forgery on the name of his father's oldest friend that had driven him from England. He had the choice of leaving his native land for ever or going to prison, and he chose the former. The sorrow of the

crime killed his mother. From Adelaide, where he and Barbara had made their new home, he wandered to the far interior and afterwards to Sydney; then came his imprisonment on a charge of manslaughter, and now he was free—but what a freedom!

With the name of Roadmaster often heard at Wandenong, Barbara Golding's heart had no warning instinct of who the bushranger was. She thought only and continuously of the day when her brother should be released, to begin the race of life again with her. She had yet to learn in what manner they come to the finish who make a false start.

Louis Bachelor, again in his place Rahway, tried to drive away his guesses at the truth by his beloved science. When sleep would not come at night he rose and worked in his laboratory; and the sailors of many a passing vessel saw the light of his lamp in the dim hours before dawn, and spoke of fever in the port of Rahway. Nor did they speak without reason; fever was preparing a victim for the sacrifice at Rahway, and Louis Bachelor was fed with its poison till he grew haggard and weak.

One night he was sending his weather prognostications to Brisbane, when a stranger entered from the shore. The old man did not at first look up, and the other leisurely studied him as the sounder clicked its message. When the key was closed the new-comer said: "Can you send a message to Brisbane for me?"

"It is after hours; I cannot," was the reply.

"But you were just sending one."

"That was official," and the elder man passed his hand wearily along his forehead. He was very pale.

The other drew the telegraph-forms towards him and wrote on one, saying as he did so: "My business is im-

portant;" then handing over what he had written, and, smiling ironically, added: "Perhaps you will consider that official."

Louis Bachelor took the paper and read as follows: "*To the Colonial Secretary, Brisbane. I am here tonight; to-morrow find me. Roadmaster.*" He read it twice before he fully comprehended it. Then he said, as if awakening from a dream: "You are—"

"I am Roadmaster," said the other.

But now the soldier and official in the other were awake. He drew himself up, and appeared to measure his visitor as a swordsman would his enemy. "What is your object in coming here?" he asked.

"For you to send that message if you choose. That you may arrest me peaceably if you wish; or there are men at *The Angel's Rest* and a Chinaman or two here who might care for active service against Roadmaster." He laughed carelessly.

"Am I to understand that you give yourself up to me?"

"Yes, to you, Louis Bachelor, Justice of the Peace, to do what you will with for this night," was the reply.

The soldier's hands trembled, but it was from imminent illness, not from fear or excitement. He came slowly towards the bushranger who, smiling, said as he advanced: "Yes, arrest me!"

Louis Bachelor raised his hand, as though to lay it on the shoulder of the other; but something in the eyes of the highwayman stayed his hand.

"Proceed, *Captain* Louis Bachelor," said Roadmaster in a changed tone.

The hand fell to the old man's side. "Who are you?" he faintly exclaimed. "I know you yet I cannot quite remember."

More and more the voice and manner of the outlaw altered as he replied with mocking bitterness: "I was Edward Golding, gentleman; I became Edward Golding, forger; I am Roadmaster, convicted of manslaughter, and bushranger."

The old man's state was painful to see.

"You—you—that, Edward!" he uttered brokenly.

"All that. Will you arrest me now?"

"I—cannot."

The bushranger threw aside all bravado and irony, and said: "I knew you could not. Why did I come? Listen—but first, will you shelter me here to-night?"

The soldier's honourable soul rose up against this thing, but he said slowly at last: "If it is to save you from peril, yes."

Roadmaster laughed a little and rejoined: "By God, sir, you're a man! But it isn't likely that I'd accept it of you, is it? You've had it rough enough, without my putting a rock in your swag that would spoil you for the rest of the tramp. You see, I've even forgotten how to talk like a gentleman. And now, sir, I want to show you, for Barbara's sake, my dirty logbook."

Here he told the tale of his early sin and all that came of it. When he had finished the story he spoke of Barbara again. "She didn't want to disgrace you, you understand," he said. "You were at Wandenong; I know that, never mind how. She'd marry you if I were out of the way. Well, I'm going to be out of the way. I'm going to leave this country, and she's to think I'm dead, you see."

At this point Louis Bachelor swayed, and would have fallen, but that the bushranger's arms were thrown round him and helped him to a chair. "I'm afraid

that I am ill," he said; "call Gongi. Ah!" He had fainted.

The bushranger carried him to a bed, and summoned Gongi and the woman from the tavern, and in another hour was riding away through the valley of the Popri. Before thirty-six hours had passed a note was delivered to a station-hand at Wandenong addressed to Barbara Golding, and signed by the woman from *The Angel's Rest.* Within another two days Barbara Golding was at the bedside of Captain Louis Bachelor, battling with an enemy that is so often stronger than love and always kinder than shame.

In his wanderings the sick man was ever with his youth and early manhood, and again and again he uttered Barbara's name in caressing or entreaty; though it was the Barbara of far-off days that he invoked; the present one he did not know. But the night in which the crisis, the fortunate crisis, of the fever occurred, he talked of a great flood coming from the North, and in his half-delirium bade them send to headquarters, and mournfully muttered of drowned plantations and human peril. Was this instinct and knowledge working through the disordered fancies of fever? Or was it mere coincidence that the next day a great storm and flood did sweep through the valley of the Popri, putting life in danger and submerging plantations?

It was on this day that Roadmaster found himself at bay in the mangrove swamp not far from the port of Rahway, where he had expected to find a schooner to take him to the New Hebrides. It had been arranged for by a well-paid colleague in crime; but the storm had delayed the schooner, and the avenging squatters and bushmen were closing in on him at last. There was flood behind him in the valley, a foodless swamp

on the left of him, open shore and jungle on the right, the swollen sea before him; and the only avenue of escape closed by Blood Finchley's friends. He had been eluding his pursuers for days with little food and worse than no sleep. He knew that he had played his last card and lost; but he had one thing yet to do, that which even the vilest do, if they can, before they pay the final penalty—to creep back for a moment into their honest past, however dim and far away. With incredible skill he had passed under the very rifles of his hunters, and now stood almost within the stream of light which came from the window of the sick man's room, where his sister was. There was to be no more hiding, no more strategy. He told Gongi and another that he was Roadmaster, and bade them say to his pursuers, should they appear, that he would come to them upon the shore when his visit to Louis Bachelor, whom he had known in other days, was over, indicating the place at some distance from the house where they would find him.

He entered the house. The noise of the opening door brought his sister to the room.

At last she said: "Oh, Edward, you are free at last!"

"Yes, I am free at last," he quietly replied.

"I have always prayed for you, Edward, and for this."

"I know that, Barbara; but prayer cannot do anything, can it? You see, though I was born a gentleman, I had a bad strain in me. I wonder if, somewhere, generations back, there was a pirate or a gipsy in our family." He had been going to say highwayman, but paused in time. "I always intended to be good and always ended by being bad. I wanted to be of the angels and play with the devils also. I liked saints—

you are a saint, Barbara—but I loved all sinners too. I hope when—when I die, that the little bit of good that's in me will go where you are. For the rest of me, it must be as it may."

"Don't speak like that, Edward, please, dear. Yes, you have been wicked, but you have been punished, oh, those long, long years!"

"I've lost a great slice of life by both the stolen waters and the rod, but I'm going to reform now, Barbara."

"You are going to reform? Oh, I knew you would! God has answered my prayer." Her eyes lighted.

He did not speak at once, for his ears, keener than hers, were listening to a confused sound of voices coming from the shore. At length he spoke firmly: "Yes, I'm going to reform, but it's on one condition."

Her eyes mutely asked a question, and he replied: "That you marry him," pointing to the inner room, "if he lives."

"He will live, but I—I cannot tell him, Edward," she sadly said.

"He knows."

"He knows! Did you dare to tell him?" It was the lover, not the sister, who spoke then.

"Yes. And he knows also that I'm going to reform —that I'm going away."

Her face was hid in her hand. "And I kept it from him five-and-twenty years! . . . Where are you going, Edward?"

"To the Farewell Islands," he slowly replied.

And she, thinking he meant some island group in the Pacific, tearfully inquired: "Are they far away?"

"Yes, very far away, my girl."

"But you will write to me or come to see me again —you will come to see me again, sometimes, Edward?"

He paused. He knew not at first what to reply, but at length he said, with a strangely determined flash of his dark eyes: "Yes, Barbara, I will come to see you again—if I can." He stooped and kissed her. "Good-bye, Barbara."

"But, Edward, must you go to-night?"

"Yes, I must go now. They are waiting for me. Good-bye."

She would have stayed him but he put her gently back, and she said plaintively: "God keep you, Edward. Remember you said that you would come again to me."

"I shall remember," he said quietly, and he was gone.

Standing in the light from the window of the sick man's room he wrote a line in Latin on a slip of paper, begging of Louis Bachelor the mercy of silence, and gave it to Gongi, who whispered that he was surrounded. This he knew; he had not studied sounds in prison through the best years of his life for nothing. He asked Gongi to give the note to his master when he was better, and when it could be done unseen of any one. Then he turned and walked coolly towards the shore.

A few minutes later he lay upon a heap of magnolia branches breathing his life away. At the same moment of time that a rough but kindly hand closed the eyes of the bushranger, the woman from *The Angel's Rest* and Louis Bachelor saw the pale face of Roadmaster peer through the bedroom window at Barbara Golding sitting in a chair asleep; and she started and said through her half-wakefulness, looking at the window: "Where are you going, Edward?"

THE LONE CORVETTE

THE LONE CORVETTE

"And God shall turn upon them violently, and toss them like a ball into a large country."—ISAIAH.

"POOR Ted, poor Ted! I'd give my commission to see him once again."

"I believe you would, Debney."

"I knew him to the last button of his nature, and any one who knew him well could never think hardly of him. There were five of us brothers, and we all worshipped him. He could run rings round us in everything, at school, with sports, in the business of life, in love."

Debney's voice fell with the last few words, and there was a sorrowful sort of smile on his face. His look was fastened on the Farilone Islands, which lay like a black, half-closed eyelid across the disc of the huge yellow sun, as it sank in the sky straight out from the Golden Gate. The long wash of the Pacific was in their ears at their left, behind them was the *Presidio*, from which they had come after a visit to the officers, and before them was the warm, inviting distance of waters, which lead, as all men know, to the Lotos Isles.

Debney sighed and shook his head. "He was, by nature, the ablest man I ever knew. Everything in the world interested him."

"There lay the trouble, perhaps."

"Nowhere else. All his will was with the wholesome thing, but his brain, his imagination were always hunting. He was the true adventurer at the start. That was it, Mostyn."

"He found the forbidden thing more interesting than—the other?"

"Quite so. Unless a thing was really interesting, stood out, as it were, he had no use for it—nor for man nor woman."

"Lady Folingsby, for instance."

"Do you know, Mostyn, that even to-day, whenever she meets me, I can see one question in her eyes—'Where is he?' Always, always that. He found life and people so interesting that he couldn't help but be interesting himself. Whatever he was, I never knew a woman speak ill of him. . . . Once a year there comes to me a letter from an artist girl in Paris, written in language that gets into my eyes. There is always the one refrain: 'He will return some day. Say to him that I do not forget.'"

"Whatever his faults, he was too big to be anything but kind to a woman, was Ted."

"I remember the day when his resignation was so promptly accepted by the Admiralty. He walked up to the Admiral—Farquhar it was, on the *Bolingbroke*—and said: 'Admiral, if I'd been in your place I'd have done the same. I ought to resign, and I have. Yet if I had to do it over again, I'd be the same. I don't repent. I'm out of the Navy now, and it doesn't make any difference what I say, so I'll have my preachment out. If I were Admiral Farquhar, and you were Edward Debney, ex-commander, I'd say: "Debney, you're a damned good fellow and a damned bad officer."'

"The Admiral liked Edward, in spite of all, better than any man in the Squadron, for Ted's brains were worth those of any half-dozen officers he had. He simply choked, and then, before the whole ship, dropped

both hands on his shoulders, and said: 'Debney, you're a damned good fellow and a damned bad officer, and I wish to God you were a damned bad fellow and a damned good officer—for then there were no need to part.' At that they parted. But as Edward was leaving, the Admiral came forward again, and said: 'Where are you going, Debney?' 'I'm going nowhere, sir,' Ted answered. 'I'm being tossed into strange waters—a lone corvette of no squadron.' He stopped, smiled, and then said—it was so like him, for, with all his wildness, he had the tastes of a student: 'You remember that passage in Isaiah, sir, "*And God shall turn upon them violently, and toss them like a ball into a large country*"?'

"There wasn't a man but had a kind thought for him as he left, and there was rain in the eyes of more than one A.B. Well, from that day he disappeared, and no one has seen him since. God knows where he is; but I was thinking, as I looked out there to the setting sun, that his wild spirit would naturally turn to the South, for civilised places had no charm for him."

"I never knew quite why he had to leave the Navy."

"He opened fire on a French frigate off Tahiti which was boring holes in an opium smuggler."

Mostyn laughed. "Of course; and how like Ted it was—an instinct to side with the weakest."

"Yes, coupled with the fact that the Frenchman's act was mere brutality, and had not sufficient motive or justification. So Ted pitched into him."

"Did the smuggler fly the British flag?"

"No, the American; and it was only the intervention of the United States which prevented serious international trouble. Out of the affair came Ted a shipwreck."

"Have you never got on his track?"

"Once I thought I had at Singapore, but nothing came of it. No doubt he changed his name. He never asked for, never got, the legacy my poor father left him."

"What was it made you think you had come across him at Singapore?"

"Oh, certain significant things."

"What was he doing?"

Debney looked at his old friend for a moment debatingly, then said quietly: "Slave-dealing, and doing it successfully, under the noses of men-of-war of all nations."

"But you decided it was not he after all?"

"I doubted. If Ted came to that, he would do it in a very big way. It would appeal to him on some grand scale, with real danger and, say, a few scores of thousands of pounds at stake—not unless."

Mostyn lit a cigar, and, thrusting his hands into his pockets, regarded the scene before him with genial meditation—the creamy wash of the sea at their feet, the surface of the water like corrugated silver stretching to the farther sky, with that long lane of golden light crossing it to the sun, Alcatras, Angel Island, Saucilito, the rocky fortresses, and the men-of-war in the harbour, on one of which flew the British ensign—the *Cormorant*, commanded by Debney.

"Poor Ted!" said Mostyn at last; "he might have been anything."

"Let us get back to the *Cormorant*," responded Debney sadly. "And see, old chap, when you get back to England, I wish you'd visit my mother for me, for I shall not see her for another year, and she's always anxious—always since Ted left."

Mostyn grasped the other's hand, and said: "It's the second thing I'll do on landing, my boy."

Then they talked of other things, but as they turned at the Presidio for a last look at the Golden Gate, Mostyn said musingly: "I wonder how many millions' worth of smuggled opium have come in that open door?"

Debney shrugged a shoulder. "Try Nob Hill, Fifth Avenue, and the Champs Elysées. What does a poor man-o'-war's-man know of such things?"

An hour later they were aboard the *Cormorant* dining with a number of men asked to come and say good-bye to Mostyn, who was starting for England the second day following, after a pleasant cruise with Debney.

Meanwhile, from far beyond that yellow lane of light running out from Golden Gate, there came a vessel, sailing straight for harbour. She was an old-fashioned cruiser, carrying guns, and when she passed another vessel she hoisted the British flag. She looked like a half-obsolete corvette, spruced up, made modern by every possible device, and all her appointments were shapely and in order. She was clearly a British man-of-war, as shown in her trim-dressed sailors, her good handful of marines; but her second and third lieutenants seemed little like Englishmen. There was gun-drill and cutlass-drill every day, and, what was also singular, there was boat-drill twice a day, so that the crew of this man-of-war, as they saw Golden Gate ahead of them, were perhaps more expert at boat-drill than any that sailed. They could lower and raise a boat with a wonderful expertness in a bad sea, and they rowed with clock-like precision and machine-like force.

Their general discipline did credit to the British

Navy. But they were not given to understand that by their Commander, Captain Shewell, who had an eye like a spot of steel and a tongue like aloes or honey as the mood was on him. It was clear that he took his position seriously, for he was as rigid and exact in etiquette as an admiral of the old school, and his eye was as keen for his officers as for his men; and that might have seemed strange too, if one had seen him two years before commanding a schooner with a roving commission in the South Seas. Then he was more genial of eye and less professional of face. Here he could never be mistaken for anything else than the commander of a man-of-war —it was in his legs, in the shoulder he set to the wind, in the tone of his orders, in his austere urbanity to his officers. Yet there was something else in his eye, in his face, which all this professionalism could not hide, even when he was most professional—some elusive, subterranean force or purpose.

This was most noticeable when he was shut away from the others in his cabin. Then his whole body seemed to change. The eye became softer, and yet full of a sort of genial devilry, the body had a careless alertness and elasticity, the whole man had the athletic grace of a wild animal, and his face had a hearty sort of humour, which the slightly-lifting lip, in its insolent disdain, could not greatly modify. He certainly seemed well pleased with himself, and more than once, as he sat alone, he laughed outright, and once he said aloud, as his fingers ran up and down a schedule—not a man-o'-war's schedule—laughing softly:

"Poor old Farquhar, if he could see me now!" Then, to himself: "Well, as I told him, I was violently tossed like a ball into the large country; and I've had a lot of adventure and sport. But here's something more—

the biggest game ever played between nations by a private person—with fifty thousand pounds as the end thereof, if all goes well with my lone corvette."

The next evening, just before dusk, after having idled about out of sight of the signal station nearly all day, Captain Shewell entered Golden Gate with the *Hornet*—of no squadron. But the officers at the signal station did not know that, and simply telegraphed to the harbour, in reply to the signals from the corvette, that a British man-of-war was coming. She came leisurely up the bay, with Captain Shewell on the bridge. He gave a low whistle as he saw the *Cormorant* in the distance. He knew the harbour well, and saw that the *Cormorant* had gone to a new anchorage, not the same as British men-of-war took formerly. He drew away to the old anchorage—he need not be supposed to know that a change was expected; besides—and this was important to Captain Shewell—the old anchorage was near the docks; and it was clear, save for one little life-boat and a schooner which was making out as he came up.

As the *Hornet* came to anchor the *Cormorant* saluted her, and she replied instantly. Customs officers who were watching the craft from the shore or from their boats put down their marine glasses contentedly when they saw and heard the salutes. But two went out to the *Hornet*, were received graciously by Captain Shewell, who, over a glass of wine in his cabin—appropriately hung with pictures of Nelson and Collingwood—said that he was proceeding to Alaska to rescue a crew shipwrecked which had taken refuge on a barren island, and that he was leaving the next day as soon as he could get some coal; though he feared it would be difficult coaling up that night. He did not need a great deal,

he said—which was, indeed, the case—but he did need some, and for the *Hornet's* safety he must have it. After this, with cheerful compliments, and the perfunctory declaration on his part that there was nothing dutiable on board, the officers left him, greatly pleased with his courtesy, saluted by the sailors standing at the gangway as they left the ship's side. The officers did not notice that one of these sailors winked an eye at another, and that both then grinned, and were promptly ordered aft by the second lieutenant.

As soon as it was very dark two or three boats pushed out from the *Hornet*, and rowed swiftly to shore, passing a Customs boat as they went, which was saluted by the officers in command. After this, boats kept passing backward and forward for a long time between the *Hornet* and the shore, which was natural, seeing that a first night in port is a sort of holiday for officers and men. If these sailors had been watched closely, however, it would have been seen that they visited but few saloons on shore, and drank little, and then evidently as a blind. Close watching would also have discovered the fact that there were a few people on shore who were glad to see the safe arrival of the *Hornet*, and who, about one o'clock in the morning, almost fell on the neck of Captain Shewell as they bade him goodbye. Then, for the rest of the night, coal was carried out to the *Hornet* in boats and barges.

By daybreak her coal was aboard, then came cleaning up, and preparations to depart. Captain Shewell's eye was now much on the *Cormorant*. He had escaped one danger, he had landed half a million dollars' worth of opium in the night, under the very nose of the law, and while Customs boats were patrolling the bay; but there was another danger—the inquisitiveness of the

Cormorant. It was etiquette for him to call upon the captain of the *Cormorant*, and he ought to have done so the evening before, but he had not dared to run the risk, nor could he venture this morning. And yet if the *Cormorant* discovered that the *Hornet* was not a British man-of-war, but a bold and splendid imposture, made possible by a daring ex-officer of the British Navy, she might open fire, and he could make but a sorry fight, for he was equipped for show rather than for deadly action. He had got this ex-British man-of-war two years before, purchased in Brazil by two adventurous spirits in San Francisco, had selected his crew carefully, many of them deserters from the British Navy, drilled them, and at last made this bold venture under the teeth of a fortress, and at the mouth of a warship's guns.

Just as he was lifting anchor to get away, he saw a boat shoot out from the side of the *Cormorant.* Captain Debney, indignant at the lack of etiquette, and a little suspicious also now—for there was no *Hornet* in the Pacific Squadron, though there was a *Hornet*, he knew, in the China Squadron—was coming to visit the discourteous commander.

He was received with the usual formalities, and was greeted at once by Captain Shewell. As the eyes of the two men met both started, but Captain Debney was most shaken. He turned white, and put out his hand to the bulwark to steady himself. But Captain Shewell held the hand that had been put out; shook it, pressed it. He tried to urge Captain Debney forward, but the other drew back to the gangway.

"Pull yourself together, Dick, or there'll be a mess," said Shewell softly.

"My God, how could you do it?" replied his brother aghast.

Meanwhile the anchor had been raised, and the *Hornet* was moving towards the harbour mouth.

"You have ruined us both," said Richard Debney.

"Neither, Dick! I'll save your bacon." He made a sign, the gangway was closed, he gave the word for full steam ahead, and the *Hornet* began to race through the water before Captain Debney guessed his purpose.

"What do you mean to do?" he asked sternly, as he saw his own gig falling astern.

"To make it hard for you to blow me to pieces. You've got to do it, of course, if you can, but I must get a start."

"How far do you intend carrying me?"

"To the Farilones, perhaps."

Richard Debney's face had a sick look. "Take me to your cabin," he whispered.

What was said behind the closed door no man in this world knows, and it is well not to listen too closely to those who part, knowing that they will never meet again. They had been children in the one mother's arms; there was nothing in common between them now except that ancient love.

Nearing the Farilones, Captain Debney was put off in an open boat. Standing there alone, he was once more a naval officer, and he called out sternly: "Sir, I hope to sink you and your smuggling craft within four-and-twenty hours!"

Captain Shewell spoke no word, but saluted deliberately, and watched his brother's boat recede, till it was a speck upon the sea, as it moved towards Golden Gate.

"Good old Dick!" he said at last, as he turned away toward the bridge. "And he'll do it, if he can!"

But he never did, for as the *Cormorant* cleared the harbour that evening there came an accident to her

machinery, and with two days' start the *Hornet* was on her way to be sold again to a South American Republic.

And Edward Debney, once her captain? What does it matter?

A SABLE SPARTAN

Lady Tynemouth was interested; his Excellency was amused. The interest was real, the amusement was not ironical. Blithelygo, seeing that he had at least excited the attention of the luncheon party, said half-apologetically: "Of course my experience is small, but in many parts of the world I have been surprised to see how uniform revolutionises the savage. Put him into Convention, that is clothes, give him Responsibility, that is a chance to exercise vanity and power, and you make him a Britisher—a good citizen to all intents and purposes."

Blithelygo was a clever fellow in his way. He had a decided instinct for military matters, and for good cigars and pretty women. Yet he would rather give up both than an idea which had got firmly fixed in his mind. He was very deferential in his remarks, but at the same time he was quite willing to go into a minority which might *not* include pretty Miss Angel who sat beside him, if he was not met by conclusive good arguments.

In the slight pause which followed his rather long speech, his Excellency passed the champagne cup, and Lady Tynemouth said: "But I suppose it depends somewhat on the race, doesn't it, Mr. Travers? I am afraid mere uniforming would scarcely work successfully—among the Bengalese, for instance."

"A wretched crew," said Major Warham; "awful liars, awful scoundrels, need kicking every morning."

"Of course," said Blithelygo, "there must be some

consideration of race. But look at the Indian Mutiny. Though there was revolt, look at those who 'fought with us faithful and few'; look at the fidelity of the majority of the native servants. Look at the native mounted police in Australia; at the Sikhs in the Settlements and the Native States; at the Indian scouts of the United States and Canada; and look at these very Indian troops at your door, your Excellency! I think my principle holds good; give uniform, give responsibility—under European surveillance of course—get British civilisation."

His Excellency's eyes had been wandering out of the window, over the white wall and into the town where Arabia, India, Africa, the Islands of the South and Palestine were blended in a quivering, radiant panorama. Then they rose until they fell upon Jebel Shamsan, in its intoxicating red and opal far away, and upon the frowning and mighty rampart that makes Aden one of the most impregnable stations of the Empire. The amusement in his eyes had died away; and as he dipped his fingers in the water at his side and motioned for a quickening of the punkahs, he said: "There is force in what you say. It would be an unpleasant look-out for us here and in many parts of the world if we could not place reliance on the effect of uniform; but"—and the amused look came again to his eyes—"we somehow get dulled to the virtues of Indian troops and Somauli policemen. We can't get perspective, you see."

Blithelygo good-naturedly joined in the laugh that went round the table; for nearly all there had personal experience of "uniformed savages." As the ladies rose Miss Angel said naïvely to Blithelygo: "You ought to spend a month in Aden, Mr. Blithelygo. Don't go by the next boat, then you can study uniforms here."

We settled down to our cigars. Major Warham was an officer from Bombay. He had lived in India for twenty years: long enough to be cynical of justice at the Horse Guards or at the India Office: to become in fact bitter against London, S.W., altogether. It was he that proposed a walk through the town.

The city lay sleepy and listless beneath a proud and distant sky of changeless blue. Idly sat the Arabs on the benches outside the low-roofed coffee-houses; lazily worked the makers of ornaments in the bazaars; yawningly pounded the tinkers; greedily ate the children; the city was cloyed with ease. Warham, Blithelygo and myself sat in the evening sun surrounded by gold-and-scarlet bedizened gentry of the desert, and drank strong coffee and smoked until we too were satisfied, if not surfeited; animals like the rest. Silence fell on us. This was a new life to two of us; to Warham it was familiar, therefore comfortable and soporific. I leaned back and languidly scanned the scene; eyes half-shut, senses half-awake. An Arab sheikh passed swiftly with his curtained harem; and then went filing by in orderly and bright array a number of Mahommedans, the first of them bearing on a cushion of red velvet, and covered with a cloth of scarlet and gold, a dead child to burial. Down from the colossal tanks built in the mountain gorges that were old when Mahomet was young, there came donkeys bearing great leathern bottles such as the Israelites carried in their forty years' sojourning. A long line of swaying camels passed dustily to the desert that burns even into this city of Aden, built on a volcano; groups of Somaulis, lithe and brawny, moved chattering here and there; and a handful of wandering horsemen, with spears and snowy garments, were being swallowed up in the mountain defiles.

The day had been long, the coffee and cigarettes had been heavy, and we dozed away in the sensuous atmosphere. Then there came, as if in a dream, a harsh and far-off murmur of voices. It grew from a murmur to a sharp cry, and from a sharp cry to a roar of rage. In a moment we were on our feet, and dashing away toward the sound.

The sight that greeted us was a strange one, and horribly picturesque. In front of a low-roofed house of stone was a crowd of Mahommedans fierce with anger and loud in imprecation. Knives were flashing; murder was afoot. There stood, with his back to the door of the house, a Somauli policeman, defending himself against this raging little mob. Not defending himself alone. Within the house he had thrust a wretched Jew, who had defiled a Mahommedan mosque; and he was here protecting him against these nervous champions of the faith.

Once, twice, thrice, they reached him; but he fought on with his unwounded arm. We were unarmed and helpless; no Somaulis were near. Death glittered in these white blades. But must this Spartan die?

Now there was another cry, a British cheer, a gleam of blue and red, a glint of steel rounding the corner at our left, and the Mahommedans broke away, with a parting lunge at the Somauli. British soldiers took the place of the bloodthirsty mob.

Danger over, the Somauli sank down on the threshold, fainting from loss of blood. As we looked at him gashed all over, but not mortally wounded, Blithelygo said with glowing triumph: "British, British, you see!"

At that moment the door of the house opened, and out crawled to the feet of the officer in command the

miserable Israelite with his red hemmed skirt and greasy face. For this cowardly creature the Somauli policeman had perilled his life. Sublime! How could we help thinking of the talk at his Excellency's table?

Suddenly the Somauli started up and looked round anxiously. His eyes fell on the Jew. His countenance grew peaceful. He sank back again into the arms of the surgeon and said, pointing to the son of Abraham: "He owe me for a donkey."

Major Warham looking at Blithelygo said with a chilled kind of lustre to his voice: "British, so British, don't you know!"

A VULGAR FRACTION

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SOMETIMES when, like Mirza, I retire to my little Hill of Bagdad for meditation, there comes before me the bright picture of Hawaii with its coral-bulwarked islands and the memory of an idle sojourn on their shores. I remember the rainbow-coloured harbour of Honolulu Hilo, the simply joyous Arcadie at the foot of Mauna Loa, and Mauna Kea which lifted violet shoulders to the morning, the groves of cocoa-palms and tamarinds, the waterfalls dropping over sheer precipices a thousand feet into the ocean, the green embrasures where the mango, the guava, and the lovi lovi grow, and where the hibiscus lifts red hands to the light. I call to mind the *luau* where Kalakua, the King, presided over the dispensation of stewed puppy, lifted to one's lips by brown but fair fingers, of live shrimps, of *poi* and *taro* and balls of boiled sea-weed stuffed with Heaven knows what; and to crown all, or to drown all, the insinuating liquor *kava*, followed when the festival was done by the sensuous but fascinating *hula hula*, danced by maidens of varying loveliness. Of these Van Blaricom, the American, said, "they'd capture Chicago in a week with that racket," and he showed Blithelygo his calculations as to profits.

The moments that we enjoyed the most, however, were those that came when feast and serenade were over, when *Hawaii Ponoi*, the National Anthem, was sung, and we lay upon the sands and watched the long

white coverlet of foam folding towards the shore, and saw visions and dreamed dreams. But at times we also breathed a prayer—a prayer that somebody or something would come and carry off Van Blaricom, whose satire, born and nurtured in Chicago, was ever turned against Hawaii and all that therein was.

There are times when I think I had a taste of Paradise in Hawaii—but a Paradise not without a Satanic intruder in the shape of that person from Illinois. Nothing escaped his scorn. One day we saw from Diamond Head three water-spouts careering to the south, a splendid procession of the powers of the air. He straightway said to Kalakua, that "a Michigan cyclone had more git-up-and-git about it than them three black cats with their tails in the water." He spent hours in thinking out rudely caustic things to repeat about this little kingdom. He said that the Government was a Corliss-engine running a sewing machine. He used to ask the Commander of the Forces when the Household Cavalry were going into summer camp—they were twelve. The only thing that appeared to impress him seriously was Molokai, the desolate island where the lepers made their cheerless prison-home. But the reason for his gravity appeared when he said to Blithelygo and myself: "There'd be a fortune in that menagerie if it was anchored in Lake Michigan." On that occasion he was answered in strong terms. It was the only time I ever heard Blithelygo use profanity. But the American merely dusted his patent leather shoes with a gay silk kerchief, adjusted his clothes on his five-foot frame as he stood up; and said: "Say you ought to hear my partner in Chicago when he lets out. *He's* an artist!"

This Man from the West was evidently foreordained

to play a part in the destinies of Blithelygo and myself, for during two years of travel he continuously crossed our path. His only becoming quality was his ample extravagance. Perhaps it was the bountiful impetus he gave to the commerce of Honolulu, and the fact that he talked of buying up a portion of one of the Islands for sugar-planting, that induced the King to be gracious to him. However that might be, when Blithelygo and I joined his Majesty at Hilo to visit the extinct volcano of Kilauéa, there was the American coolly puffing his cigar and quizzically feeling the limbs and prodding the ribs of the one individual soldier who composed the King's body-guard. He was not interested in our arrival further than to give us a nod. In a pause that followed our greetings, he said to his Majesty, while jerking his thumb towards the soldier: "King, how many of 'em have you got in your army?"

His Majesty blandly but with dignity turned to his aide-de-camp and raised his eyebrows inquiringly. The aide-de-camp answered: "Sixty."

"Then we've got $\frac{1}{60}$th of the standing army with us, eh?" drawled Van Blaricom.

The aide-de-camp bowed affirmatively. The King was scanning Mauna Loa. The American winked at us. The King did not see the wink, but he had caught a tone in the voice of the invader, which brought, as I thought, a slight flush to his swarthy cheek. The soldier—his name was Lilikalu—looked from his King to the critic of his King's kingdom and standing army, and there was a glow beneath his long eyelashes which suggested that three-quarters of a century of civilisation had not quite drawn the old savage spirit from the descendants of Lailai, the Hawaiian Eve.

During the journey up the Forty-Mile Track to

Kilauéa, the American enveloped $\frac{1}{60}$th of his Majesty's standing army with his Michigan Avenue and peanut-stand wit, and not always, it was observed, out of the hearing of the King, who nevertheless preserved a marked unconsciousness. Majesty was at a premium with two of us on that journey. Only once was the Chicagonian's wit not stupid as well as offensive. It chanced thus. The afternoon in which we reached the volcano was suffocatingly hot, and the King's body-guard had discarded all clothing—brief when complete—save what would not count in any handicap. He was therefore at peace, while the rest of us, Royalty included, were inwardly thinking that after this the orthodox future of the wicked would have no terrors. At a moment when the body-guard appeared to be most ostentatious in his freedom from clothing the American said to his Majesty: "King, do you know what $\frac{1}{60}$th of your standing army is?" The reply was a low and frigid: "No."

"It's a vulgar fraction."

There were seven of us walking on the crater of the volcano: great banks of sulphur on the right, dark glaciers of lava on the left, high walls of scoria and volcanic crust enveloping us all about. We were four thousand feet above the level of the sea. We were standing at the door of the House of Pele, the Goddess of Fire. We knocked, but she would not open. The flames were gone from her hearthstone, her smoke was gorging the throat of the suffering earth.

"Say, she was awful sick while she was about it," said the American as he stumbled over the belched masses of lava.

That was one day. But two days after we stood at

Pele threshold again. Now red scoria and pumice and sulphur boiled and rolled where the hard lava had frayed our boots. Within thirty-six hours Kilauéa has sprung from its flameless sleep into sulphurous life and red roaring grandeur. Though Pele came but slowly, she came; and a lake of fire beat at the lofty sides of the volcanic cup. The ruby spray flashed up to the sky, and geysers of flame hurled long lances at the moon.

"King," said the American, "why don't you turn it into an axe-factory?"

At last the time came when we must leave this scene of marvel and terror, and we retired reluctantly. There were two ways by which we might return to the bridle-path that led down the mountain. The American desired to take the one by which we had not come; the rest of us, tired out, preferred to go as we came—the shortest way. A compromise was made by his Majesty sending $\frac{1}{10}$th of the standing army with the American, who gaily said he would join us, "horse, foot and cavalry," in the bridle-path. We reached the meeting-point first, but as we looked back we saw with horror that two streams of fire were flowing down the mountain side. We were to the left of them both, and safe; but between them, and approaching us, were Van Blaricom and the native soldier. The two men saw their danger, and pushed swiftly down the mountain-side and towards us, but more swiftly still these narrow snake-like streams came on.

Presently the streams veered towards each other and joined. The two men were on an island with a shore of fire. There was one hope—the shore was narrow yet. But in running the American fell, spraining his ankle badly. We were speechless, but the King's lips parted

with a moan, as he said: "Lilikalu can jump the stream, but the other—!"

They were now at the margin of that gleaming shore, the American wringing his hands. It was clear to him that unless a miracle happened he would see his beloved Chicago no more; for the stream behind them was rapidly widening.

I think I see that $\frac{1}{60}$th of his Majesty's infantry as he looked down upon the slight and cowering form of the American. His moment of vengeance had come. A second passed, marked by the splashing roar of the waves in the hill above us, and then the soldier—naked, all save the boots he wore—seized the other in his arms, stepped back a few paces, and then ran forward and leaped across the barrier of flame. Not quite across! One foot and ankle sank into the molten mass as, with a shiver of agony, he let the American fall on the safe ground. An instant later and he lay at our feet, helpless and maimed for many a day; and the standing army of the King was deprived of $\frac{1}{60}$th of its strength.

HOW PANGO WANGO WAS ANNEXED

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BLITHELYGO and I were at Levuka, Fiji, languidly waiting for some "trader" or mail-steamer to carry us away anywhere. Just when we were bored beyond endurance and when cigars were running low, a Fijian came to us and said: "That fellow, white fellow, all a-same a-you, long a-shore. Pleni sail. Pleni Melican flag."

We went to the beach, and there was Jude Van Blaricom, our American. We had left him in New Zealand at the Pink Terraces, bidding him an eternal farewell. We wished it so. But we had met him afterwards at Norfolk Island, and again at Sydney, and we knew now that we should never cease to meet him during our sojourn on this earth.

An hour later we were on board his yacht, *Wilderness,* being introduced to MacGregor, the captain, to Mr. Dagmar Caramel, C.M.G., his guest, and to some freshly made American cocktails. Then we were shown over the *Wilderness.* She looked as if she had been in the hands of a Universal Provider. Evidently the American had no intention of roughing it. His toilet requisites were a dream. From the dazzling completeness of the snug saloon we were taken aft to see two coops filled with fowls. "Say," said the American, "how's that for fresh meat?" Though a little ashamed of it, we then and there accepted the Chicagonian's invitation to take a cruise with him in the South Pacific.

For days the cruise was pleasant enough, and then

things began to drag. Fortunately there came a new interest in the daily routine. One day Van Blaricom was seen standing with the cook before the fowl coops deeply interested; and soon after he had triumphantly arranged what he called "The Coliseum." This was an enclosure of canvas chiefly, where we had cock-fights daily. The gladiators were always ready for the arena. One was called U. S., after General U. S. Grant, and the other Bob Lee, after General Robert Lee.

"Go it, U. S. Lift your skewers, you bobtail. Give it to him, you've got him in Andersonville, U. S." Thus, day by day, were the warriors encouraged by Van Blaricom.

There is nothing very elegant or interesting in the record so far, but it all has to do with the annexation of Pango Wango, and, as Blithelygo long afterwards remarked, it shows how nations sometimes acquire territory. Yes, this Coliseum of ours had as much to do with the annexation as had the American's toilet requisites—his hair-oil and perfume bottles. In the South Pacific, a thousand miles from land, Van Blaricom was redolent of new-mown hay and heliotrope.

It was tropically hot. We were in the very middle of the hurricane season. The air had no nerve. Even the gladiators were relaxing their ardour; and soon the arena was cleared altogether, for we were in the midst of a hurricane. It was a desperate time, but just when it seemed most desperate the wheel of doom turned backward and we were saved. The hurricane found us fretful with life by reason of the heat, it left us thankful for being let to live at all; though the *Wilderness* appeared little better than a drifting wreck. Our commissariat was gone, or almost gone, we hadn't any masts or sails to speak of, and the cook informed us that we

had but a few gallons of fresh water left; yet, strange to say, the gladiators remained to us. When the peril was over it surprised me to remember that Van Blaricom had been comparatively cool through it all; for I had still before me a certain scene at the volcano of Kilauéa. I was to be still more surprised.

We were by no means out of danger. MacGregor did not know where we were; the fresh water was vanishing rapidly, and our patch of sail was hardly enough to warrant a breeze taking any interest in it. We had been saved from immediate destruction, but it certainly seemed like exchanging Tophet for a slow fire. When the heat was greatest and the spiritual gloom thickest the American threw out the sand-bags, as it were, and hope mounted again.

"Say, MacGregor," he said, "run up the American flag. There's luck in the old bandana."

This being done, he added: "Bring along the cigars; we'll have out U. S. and Bob Lee in the saloon."

Our Coliseum was again open to the public at two shillings a head. That had been the price from the beginning. The American was very business-like in the matter, but this admission fee was our only contribution to the expenses of that cruise. Sport could only allay, it could not banish our sufferings. We became as haggard and woe-begone a lot as ever ate provisions impregnated with salt; we turned wistfully from claret to a teaspoonful of water, and had tongues like pieces of blotting-paper. One morning we were sitting at breakfast when we heard a cock-crow, then another and another. MacGregor sprang to his feet crying: "Land!" In a moment we were on deck. There was no land to be seen, but MacGregor maintained that a cock was a better look-out than a human being any time, and in

this case he was right. In a few hours we did sight land.

Slowly we came nearer to the island. MacGregor was not at all sure where it was, but guessed it might be one of the Solomon Islands. When within a few miles of it Blithelygo unfeelingly remarked that its population might be cannibalistic. MacGregor said it was very likely; but we'd have to be fattened first, and that would give us time to turn round. The American said that the Stars and Stripes and the Coliseum had brought us luck so far, and he'd take the risk if we would.

The shore was crowded with natives, and as we entered the bay we saw hundreds take to the water in what seemed fearfully like war-canoes. We were all armed with revolvers, and we had half a dozen rifles handy. As the islanders approached we could see that they also were armed; and a brawny race they looked, and particularly bloodthirsty. In the largest canoe stood a splendid-looking fellow, evidently a chief. On the shore near a large palm-thatched house a great group was gathered, and the American, levelling his glass, said: "Say, it's a she-queen or something over there."

At that moment the canoes drew alongside, and while MacGregor adjured us to show no fear, he beckoned the chief to come aboard. An instant, and a score of savages, armed with spears and nulla-nullas were on deck. MacGregor made signs that we were hungry, Blithelygo that we were thirsty, and the American, smoking all the while, offered the chief a cigar. The cigar was refused, but the headman ordered a couple of natives ashore, and in five minutes we had wild bananas and fish to eat, and water to drink. But that five

minutes of waiting were filled with awkward incidents. Blithelygo, meaning to be hospitable, had brought up a tumbler of claret for the headman. With violent language, MacGregor stopped its presentation; upon which the poison of suspicion evidently entered the mind of the savage, and he grasped his spear threateningly. Van Blaricom, who wore a long gold watch-chain, now took it off and offered it to the chief, motioning him to put it round his neck. The hand was loosened on the spear, and the Chicagonian stepped forward and put the chain over the head of the native. As he did so the chief suddenly thrust his nose forward and sniffed violently at the American.

What little things decide the fate of nations and men! This was a race whose salutation was not nose-rubbing, but smelling, and the American had not in our worst straits failed to keep his hair sleek with hair-oil, verbena scented, and to perfume himself daily with new-mown hay or heliotrope. Thus was he of goodly savour to the chief, and the eyes of the savage grew bright. At that moment the food and drink came. During the repast the chief chuckled in his own strange way, and, when we slackened in our eating, he still motioned to us to go on.

Van Blaricom, who had been smiling, suddenly looked grave. "By the great horn-spoons," he said, "they have begun already! They're fattening us!"

MacGregor nodded affirmatively, and then Van Blaricom's eyes wandered wildly from the chief to that group on the shore where he thought he had seen the "she-queen." At that moment the headman came forward again, again sniffed at him, and again chuckled, and all the natives as they looked on us chuckled also. It was most unpleasant. Suddenly I saw the Ameri-

can start. He got up, turned to us, and said: "I've got an idea. MacGregor, get U. S. and Bob Lee."

Then he quietly disappeared, the eyes of the savages suspiciously following him. In a moment he came back, bearing in his arms a mirror, a bottle of hair-oil, a couple of bottles of perfume, a comb and brush, some variegated bath towels, and an American flag. First he let the chief sniff at the bottles, and then, pointing to the group on the shore, motioned to be taken over. In a few moments he and MacGregor were being conveyed towards the shore in the gathering dusk.

Four hours passed. It was midnight. There was noise of drums and shouting on the shore, which did not relieve our suspense. Suddenly there was a commotion in the canoes that still remained near the *Wilderness*. The headman appeared before us, and beckoned to Blithelygo and myself to come. The beckoning was friendly, and we hoped that affairs had taken a more promising turn.

In a space surrounded with palms and ti-trees a great fire was burning. There was a monotonous roll of the savage tom-tom and a noise of shouting and laughter. Yes, we were safe, and the American had done it. The Coliseum was open, MacGregor was ring-master, and U. S. and Bob Lee were at work. This show, with other influences, had conquered Pango Wango. The American flag was hoisted on a staff, and on a mighty stump there sat Van Blaricom, almost innocent of garments, I grieve to say, with one whom we came to know as Totimalu, Queen of Pango Wango, a half circle of savages behind them. Van Blaricom and MacGregor had been naturalised by having their shoulders lanced with a spear-point, and then rubbed against the lanced shoulders of the chiefs. The taking of Pango

Wango had not been, I fear, a moral victory. Van Blaricom was smoking a cigar, and was writing on a piece of paper, using the back of a Pango Wango man as a desk. The Queen's garments were chiefly variegated bath-towels, and she was rubbing her beaming countenance and ample bosom with hair-oil and essence of new-mown hay.

Van Blaricom nodded to us nonchalantly, saying: "It's all right—she's Totimalu, the Queen. Sign here, Queen," and he motioned for the obese beauty to hold the pencil. She did so, and then he stood up, and, while the cock-fight still went on, he read, with a fine Chicago fluency, what proved to be a proclamation. As will be seen, it was full of ellipses and was fragmentary in its character, though completely effective in fact:

Know all men by these Presents, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Seeing that all men are born free and equal (*vide* United States Constitution), et cetera. We, Jude Van Blaricom, of the city of Chicago, with and by the consent of Queen Totimalu, do, in the name of George Washington, Abe Lincoln, Grover Cleveland, and the State of Illinois, and by the Grace of Heaven, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, hereby annex the Kingdom of Pango Wango to be of the territory of the American Union, to have and to hold from this day forth (*vide* Constitution of the United States), et cetera.

Signed, Jude Van Blaricom,
Totimalu × (her mark).

"Beat the drums, you niggers!" he cried, and patted Totimalu's shoulder. "Come and join the royal party, gentlemen, and pay your respects. Shake! That's right."

Thus was Pango Wango annexed.

AN AMIABLE REVENGE

AN AMIABLE REVENGE

WHENEVER any one says to me that civilisation is a failure, I refer him to certain records of Tonga, and tell him the story of an amiable revenge. He is invariably convinced that savages can learn easily the forms of convention and the arts of government—and other things. The Tongans once had a rough and coarsely effective means for preserving order and morality, but the whole scheme was too absurdly simple. Now, with a Constitution and a Sacred Majesty, and two Houses of Parliament, and a native Magistracy, they show that they are capable of becoming European in its most pregnant meaning. As the machinery has increased the grist for the mill has grown. There was a time when a breach of the Seventh Commandment was punished in Tonga with death, and it was therefore rarely committed. It is no rarity now—so does law and civilisation provide opportunities for proving their existence.

On landing at Nukalofa, the capital of Tonga, some years ago, I naturally directed my steps towards the residence of the British consul. The route lay along an arc of emerald and opal shore, the swaying cocoa-palms overhead, and native huts and missionary conventicles hidden away in coverts of ti-trees, hibiscus bushes, and limes; the sensuous, perfume-ladened air pervading all. I had seen the British flag from the coral-bulwarked harbour, but could not find it now. Leaving the indolent village behind, I passed the Palace, where I beheld the sacred majesty of Tonga on the

veranda sleepily flapping the flies from his aged calves, and I could not find that flag. Had I passed it? Was it yet to come? I leaned against a bread-fruit tree and thought upon it. The shore was deserted. Nobody had taken any notice of me; even the German steamer *Lübeck* had not brought a handful of the population to the Quay.

I was about to make up my mind to go back to the *Lübeck* and sulk, when a native issued from the grove at my left and blandly gazed upon me as he passed. He wore a flesh-coloured *vala* about the loins, a red pandanus flower in his ear, and a *lia-lia* of hibiscus blossoms about his neck. That was all. Evidently he was not interested in me, for he walked on. I choked back my feelings of hurt pride, and asked him in an off-hand kind of way, and in a sort of pigeon English, if he could tell me where the British consul lived. The stalwart subject of King George Tabou looked at me gravely for an instant, then turned and motioned down the road. I walked on beside him, improperly offended by his dignified airs, his coolness of body and manner, and what I considered the insolent plumpness and form of his chest and limbs.

He was a harmony in brown and red. Even his hair was brown. I had to admit to myself that in point of comeliness I could not stand the same scrutiny in the same amount of costume. Perhaps that made me a little imperious, a little superior in manner. Reducing my English to his comprehension as I measured it —he bowed when I asked him if he understood—I explained to him many things necessary for the good of his country. Remembering where I was, I expressed myself in terms that were gentle though austere regarding the King, and reproved the supineness and stupid-

ity of the Crown Prince. Lamenting the departed puissance of the sons of Tongatabu, I warmed to my subject, telling this savage who looked at me with so neutral a countenance how much I deplored the decadence of his race. I bade him think of the time when the Tongans, in token of magnanimous amity, rubbed noses with the white man, and of where those noses were now—between the fingers of the Caucasian. He appeared becomingly attentive, and did me the honour before I began my peroration to change the pandanus flower from the ear next to me to the other.

I had just rounded off my last sentence when he pointed to a house, half-native, half-European, in front of which was a staff bearing the British flag. With the generosity which marks the Englishman away from home I felt in my pockets and found a sixpence. I handed it to my companion; and with a "*Talofa*"—the only Tongan I knew—I passed into the garden of the consulate. The consul himself came to the door when I knocked on the lintel. After glancing at my card he shook me by the hand, and then paused. His eyes were intently directed along the road by which I had come. I looked back, and there stood the stalwart Tongan where I had left him, gazing at the sixpence I had placed in his hand. There was a kind of stupefaction in his attitude. Presently the consul said somewhat tartly: "Ah, you've been to the Palace—the Crown Prince has brought you over!"

It was not without a thrill of nervousness that I saw my royal guide flip the sixpence into his mouth—he had no pocket—and walk back towards the royal abode.

I told the consul just how it was. In turn he told his daughter, the daughter told the native servants, and in three minutes the place was echoing with lan-

guid but appreciative laughter. Natives came to the door to look at me, and after wide-eyed smiling at me for a minute gave place to others. Though I too smiled, my thoughts were gloomy; for now it seemed impossible to go to the Palace and present myself to King George and the Heir-Apparent. But the consul, and, still more, the consul's daughter, insisted; pooh-poohing my hesitation. At this distance from the scene and after years of meditation I am convinced that their efforts to induce me to go were merely an unnatural craving for sensation.

I went—we three went. Even a bare-legged King has in his own house an advantage over the European stranger. I was heated, partly from self-repression, partly from Scotch tweed. King George was quite, quite cool, and unencumbered, save for a trifling calico jacket, a pink lava-lava, and the august fly-flapper. But what heated me most, I think, was the presence of the Crown Prince, who, on my presentation, looked at me as though he had never seen me before. He was courteous, however, directing a tappa cloth to be spread for me. The things I intended to say to King George for the good of himself and his kingdom, which I had thought out on the steamer *Lübeck* and rehearsed to my guide a few hours before, would not be tempted forth. There was silence; for the consul did not seem "to be on in the scene," and presently the King of Holy Tonga nodded and fell asleep. Then the Crown Prince came forward, and beckoned me to go with him. He led me to a room which was composed of mats and bamboo pillars chiefly. At first I thought there were about ten pillars to support the roof, but my impression before I left was that there were about ten thousand. For which multiplication there were good reasons.

Again a beautiful tappa cloth was spread for me, and then ten maidens entered, and, sitting in a semi-circle, began to chew a root called kava, which, when sufficiently masticated, they returned into a calabash, water being poured on the result. Meanwhile, the Prince, dreamily and ever so gently, was rolling some kind of weed between his fingers. About the time the maidens had finished, the Crown Prince's cigarette was ready. A small calabash of the Result was handed to me, and the cigarette accompanied it. The Crown Prince sat directly opposite me, lit his own cigarette, and handed the matches. I distinctly remember the first half-dozen puffs of that cigarette, the first taste of kava—it had the flavour of soft soap and Dover's powder. I have smoked French-Canadian tobacco, I have puffed Mexican hair-lifters, but Heaven had preserved me till that hour from the cigarettes of a Crown Prince of Tonga. As I said, the pillars multiplied; the mats seemed rising from the floor; the maidens grew into a leering army of Amazons; but through it all the face of the Crown Prince never ceased to smile upon me gently.

There were some incidents of that festival which I may have forgotten, for the consul said afterwards that I was with his Royal Highness about an hour and a half. The last thing I remember about the visit was the voice of the successor to the throne of Holy Tonga asking me blandly in perfect English: "Will you permit me to show you the way to the consul's house?"

To my own credit I respectfully declined.

THE BLIND BEGGAR AND THE LITTLE RED PEG

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As Sherry and I left the theatre in Mexico City one night, we met a blind beggar tapping his way home. Sherry stopped him. "Good evening," he said over the blind man's shoulder.

"Good evening, señor," was the reply.

"You are late."

"Si, señor," and the blind man pushed a hand down in his coat pocket.

"He's got his fist on the rhino," said Sherry to me in English. "He's not quite sure whether we're footpads or not—poor devil."

"How much has he got?" asked I.

"Perhaps four or five dollars. Good business, eh? Got it in big money mostly, too—had it changed at some café."

The blind man was nervous, seemed not to understand us. He made as if to move on. Sherry and I, to reassure him, put a few reals into his hand—not without an object, for I asked Sherry to make him talk on. A policeman sauntered near with his large lantern —a superior sort of Dogberry, but very young, as are most of the policemen in Mexico, save the Rurales, that splendid company of highwaymen whom Diaz bought over from being bandits to be the guardians of the peace. This one eyed us meaningly, but Sherry gave him a reassuring nod, and our talk went on, while the blind man was fingering the money we had just

given him. Presently Sherry said to him: "I'm Bingham Sherry," adding some other particulars—"and you're all right. I've a friend here who wants to talk with you. Come along; we'll take you home—confound the garlic, what a breath he's got!"

For a moment the blind man seemed to hesitate, then he raised his head quickly, as if looking into Sherry's face; a light came over it, and he said, repeating Sherry's name: "Si, señor; si, si, señor. I know you now. You sit in the right-hand corner of the little back-room at the Café Manrique, where you come to drink chocolate. Is it not?"

"That's where I sit," said Sherry. "And now, begad, I believe I remember you. Are you Becodar?"

"Si, señor."

"Well, I'm damned!" Then, turning to me: "Lots of these fellows look so much alike that I didn't recognise this one. He's a character. Had a queer history. I'll get him to tell it."

We walked on, one on either side, Sherry using his hat to wave away the smell of garlic. Presently he said:

"Where've you been to-night, Becodar?"

"I have paid my respects to the Maison Doré, to the Café de la Concordia, to the Café Iturbide, señor."

"And how did paying your respects pay you, Becodar?"

"The noble courtesy of these cafés, and the great consideration of the hidalgos there assembled rendered to me five pesos and a trifle, señor."

"The poor ye have always with you. He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord. Becodar has large transactions with Providence, mio amigo," said Sherry.

The beggar turned his sightless eyes to us, as though he would understand these English words. Sherry,

seeing, said: "We were saying, Becodar, that the blessed saints know how to take care of a blind man, lest, having no boot, he stub his toe against a stone."

Off came Becodar's hat. He tapped the wall. "Where am I, señor?" he asked.

Sherry told him. "Ah!" he said, "the church of Saint Joseph is near." Then he crossed himself and seemed to hurry his steps. Presently he stood still. We were beside the church. Against the door, in a niche, was a figure of the Virgin in stone. He got to his knees and prayed fast. And yet as he prayed I saw his hand go to his pocket, and it fumbled and felt the money there.

"Begad, he's counting it all," said Sherry, "and now he's giving thanks for the exact amount, adding his distinguished consideration that the sum is by three reals greater than any day since Lent began. He promises to bring some flowers to-morrow for the shrine, and he also swears to go a pilgrimage to a church of Mary at Guadaloupe, and to be a kind compadré—By Jove, there you are! He's a compadré—a blind compadré!"

A little while afterwards we were in Becodar's house—a low adobe hut of two rooms with a red light burning over the door, to guard against the plague. It had a table hanging like a lid from the wall, a stone for making tortillas, a mortar for grinding red peppers, a crucifix on the wall, a short sword, a huge pistol, a pair of rusty stirrups, and several chairs. The chairs seemed to be systematically placed, and it was quite wonderful to see how the beggar twisted in and out among them without stumbling. I could not understand this, unless it was that he wished to practise moving about deftly, that he might be at least disadvan-

tage in the cafés and public resorts. He never once stirred them, and I was presently surprised to see that they were all fastened to the floor. Sherry seemed as astonished as I. From this strangeness I came to another. Looking up at the walls I saw set in the timber a number of holes cleanly bored. And in one of the last of these holes was a peg. Again my eyes shifted. From a nail in one corner of the room hung a red and white zarape, a bridle, one of those graceless bits which would wrench the mouth of the wildest horse to agony, and a sombrero. Something in these things fascinated me. I got up and examined them, while the blind man was in the other room. Turning them over I saw that the zarape was pierced with holes—bullet holes. I saw also that it was stained a deeper red than its own. I turned away, questioning Sherry. He came and looked, but said nothing, lifting a hand in deprecation. As we stood so, Becodar appeared again in the doorway, bearing an olla of pulque and some tortilla sandwiches, made of salad and shreds of meat, flavoured with garlic. He paused, his face turned towards us, with an understanding look. His instinct was remarkable. He did not speak, but came and placed the things he carried near the chairs where we had sat.

Presently I saw some writing on the adobe wall. The look of it showed the hand of youth, its bold carelessness, a boy. Some of it I set down soon afterwards, and it ran in this fashion: "The most good old compadré! But I'd like another real." Again: "One media for a banderilla, two reals for the bull-fight, five centavos for the sweet oranges, and nothing for dulces. I threw a cigar at the toreador. It was no good, but the toreador was a king. Good-night, compadré the blind, who begs." Again: "If I knew where it was

I'd take a real. Carambo! No, I wouldn't. I'll ask him. I'll give him the new sword-stick that my cousin the Rurales gave me. He doesn't need it now he's not a bandit. I'm stuffed, and my head swims. It's the pulque. Sabe Dios!" Again: "Compadré, the most miraculous, that goes tapping your stick along the wall, and jingles the silver in your pocket, whither do you wander? Have you forgotten that I am going to the cock-fight, and want a real? What is a cock-fight without a real? Compadré the brave, who stumbles along and never falls, I am sitting on your doorstep, and I am writing on your wall—if I had as much money as you I'd go to every bull-fight. I'd keep a fighting-cock myself." And once again: "If I was blind I'd have money out of the cafés, but I couldn't see my bulls toss the horses. I'll be a bandit, and when I'm old, and if Diaz doesn't put me against the wall and prod holes in me like Gonzales, they'll take me in the Rurales, same as Gerado."

"Who is it writes on the wall, Becodar?" asked Sherry of our host, as, on his knees, he poured out pulque for us.

The old man turned musingly, and made motions of writing, a pleased look in his face. "Ah, señor, he who so writes is Bernal—I am his compadré. He has his mother now, but no father, no father." He smiled. "You have never seen so bold and enterprising, never so handsome a boy. He can throw the lasso and use the lariat, and ride—sabe Dios, he can ride! His cousin Gerado the Rurales taught him. I do well by him as I may, who have other things to think on. But I do well by him."

"What became of his father, Becodar? Dead?" asked Sherry.

The beggar crossed himself. "Altogether, señor. And such a funeral had he, with the car all draped, and even the mutes with the gold braid on their black. I will tell you how it was. We were great friends, Bernal's father and me, and when the boy was born, I said, I will be compadré to him. ("Godfather, or co-father," interposed Sherry to me.) I had my sight then, señors, out of the exalted mercy of the Saints. Ah, those were great times, when I had my eyes, and no grey hairs, and could wear my sword, and ride my horses. There was work to do then, with sword and horses. It was revolution here and rebellion there, and bandits everywhere. Ah, well, it is no matter; I was speaking of the boy and his father and myself, the compadré. We were all great friends. But you know the way of men. One day he and I—Santiago, Bernal's father—had been drinking mescal. We quarrelled—I know not why. It is not well nor right for a padré and a compadré to fight—there is trouble in Heaven over that. But there is a way; and we did it as others have done. We took off our sombreros, and put our compadréship on the ground under them. That was all right—it was hid there under the hat. Then we stood up and fought—such a fight—for half an hour. Then he cut me in the thigh—a great gash—and I caught him in the neck the same. We both came to the ground then, the fight was over, and we were, of course, good friends again. I dragged myself over to him as he lay there, and lifted his head and sopped the blood at his neck with my scarf. I did not think that he was hurt so bad. But he said: 'I am gone, my Becodar. I haven't got five minutes in me. Put on your compadréship quick.' I snatched up the sombrero and put it on, and his I tucked under his head. So that we were compadrés

again. Ah, señor, señor! Soon he drew my cheek down to his and said: 'Adios, compadré: Bernal is thine now. While your eyes see, and your foot travels, let him not want a friend. Adios!' That was the end of him. They had me in Balim for a year, and then I came out to the boy; and since then for twelve years he has not suffered."

At this point he offered us the pulque and the sandwiches, and I took both, eating and enjoying as well as I could. Sherry groaned, but took the pulque, refusing the sandwiches almost violently.

"How did you lose your sight, Becodar?" asked Sherry presently.

Becodar sat perfectly still for a moment, and then said in a low voice: "I will tell you. I will make the story short. Gentle God, what a thing it was! I was for Gonzales then—a loyal gentleman, he called me—I, a gentleman! But that was his way. I was more of a spy for him. Well, I found out that a revolution was to happen, so I gave the word to Gonzales, and with the soldiers came to Puebla. The leaders were captured in a house, brought out, and without trial were set against a wall. I can remember it so well—so well! The light was streaming from an open door upon the wall. They were brought out, taken across the road and stood against a wall. I was standing a distance away, for at the moment I was sorry, though, to be sure, señor, it was for the cause of the country then, I thought. As I stood there looking, the light that streamed from the doorway fell straight upon a man standing against that wall. It was my brother—Alphonso, my brother. I shrieked and ran forward, but the rifles spat out at the moment, and the five men fell. Alphonso—ah, I thank the Virgin every day! he

did not know. His zarape hangs there on the wall, his sombrero, his sword, and his stirrups."

Sherry shifted nervously in his seat. "There's stuff for you, amigo," he said to me. "Makes you chilly, doesn't it? Shot his own brother—amounts to same thing, doesn't it? All right, Becodar, we're both sorry, and will pray for his departed spirit; go ahead, Becodar."

The beggar kept pulling at a piece of black ribbon which was tied to the arm of the chair in which he now sat. "Señors, after that I became a revolutionist—that was the only way to make it up to my brother, except by masses—I gave candles for every day in the year. One day they were all in my house here, sitting just where you sit in those chairs. Our leader was Castodilian, the bandit with the long yellow hair. We had a keg of powder which we were going to distribute. All at once Gonzales's soldiers burst in. There was a fight, we were overpowered, and Castodilian dropped his cigar—he had kept it in his mouth all the time—in the powder-keg. It killed most of us. I lost my eyes. Gonzales forgave me, if I would promise to be a revolutionist no more. What was there to do? I took the solemn oath at the grave of my mother; and so—and so, señors."

Sherry had listened with a quizzical intentness, now and again cocking his head at some dramatic bit, and when Becodar paused he suddenly leaned over and thrust a dollar into the ever-waiting hand. Becodar gave a great sign of pleasure, and fumbled again with the money in his pocket. Then, after a moment, it shifted to the bit of ribbon that hung from the chair: "See, señors," he said. "I tied this ribbon to the chair all those years ago."

My eyes were on the peg and the holes in the wall. Sherry questioned him. "Why do you spike the wall with the little red peg, Becodar?"

"The Little Red Peg, señor? Ah! It is not wonderful you notice that. There are eight bullet-holes in that zarape"—he pointed to the wall—"there are eight holes in the wall for the Little Red Peg. Well, of the eight men who fired on my brother, two are left, as you may see. The others are all gone, this way or that."

Sherry shrugged a shoulder. "There are two left, eh, Becodar? How will they die, and when?"

Becodar was motionless as a stone for a moment. Then he said softly: "I do not know quite how or when. But one drinks much mescal, and the other has a taste for quarrel. He will get in trouble with the Rurales, and then good-bye to him! Four others on furlough got in trouble with the Rurales, and that was the end. They were taken at different times for some fault—by Gerado's company—Gerado, my cousin. Camping at night, they tried to escape. There is the Law of Fire, señors, as you know. If a man thinks his guard sleeps, and makes a run for it, they do not chase—they fire; and if he escapes unhurt, good; he is not troubled. But the Rurales are fine shots!"

"You mean," said Sherry, "that the Rurales—your Gerado, for one—pretended to sleep—to be careless. The fellows made a rush for it and were dropped? Eh, Becodar, of the Little Red Peg?"

Becodar shrugged a shoulder gently. "Ah, señor, who can tell? My Gerado is a sure shot."

"Egad," said Sherry, "who'd have thought it? It looks like a sweet little vendetta, doesn't it? A blind beggar, too, with his Gerado to help the thing along.

'With his Gerado!' Sounds like a Gatling, or a bomb, or a diabolical machine, doesn't it? And yet they talk of this country being Americanised! You can't Americanise a country with a real history. Well, Becodar, that's four. What of the other two that left for Kingdom Come?"

Becodar smiled pensively. He seemed to be enduring a kind of joy, or else making light of a kind of sorrow. "Ah, those two! They were camping in a valley; they were escorting a small party of people who had come to look at ruins—Diaz was President then. Well, a party of Aztecs on the other side of the river began firing across, not as if doing or meaning any harm. By-and-bye the shot came rattling through the tent of the two. One got up, and yelled across to them to stop, but a chance bullet brought him down, and then by some great mistake a lot of bullets came through the tent, and the other soldier was killed. It was all a mistake, of course."

"Yes," cynically said Sherry. "The Aztecs got rattled, and then the bullets rattled. And what was done to the Aztecs?"

"Señor, what could be done? They meant no harm, as you can see."

"Of course, of course; but you put the Little Red Peg down two holes just the same, eh, my Becodar—with your Gerado. I smell a great man in your Gerado, Becodar. Your bandit turned soldier is a notable gentleman—gentlemen all his tribe. . . . You see," Sherry added to me, "the country was infested with bandits—some big names in this land had bandit for their titles one time or another. Well, along came Diaz, a great man. He said to the bandits: 'How much do you make a year at your trade?' They told him.

'Then,' said he, 'I'll give you as much a month and clothe you. You'll furnish your own horses and keep them, and hold the country in order. Put down the banditti, be my boundary-riders, my gentlemen guards, and we will all love you and cherish you.' And 'it was so,' as Scripture says. And this Gerado can serve our good compadré here, and the Little Red Peg in the wall keeps tally."

"What shall you do with Bernal the boy when he grows up?" added Sherry presently.

"There is the question for my mind, señor," he answered. "He would be a toreador—already has he served the matador in the ring, though I did not know it, foolish boy! But I would have him in the Rurales."

Here he fetched out and handed us a bottle of mescal. Sherry lifted his glass.

"To the day when the Little Red Peg goes no farther!" he said. We drank.

"To the blind compadré and the boy!" I added, and we drank again.

A moment afterwards in the silent street I looked back. The door was shut, and the wee scarlet light was burning over it. I fell to thinking of the Little Red Peg in the wall.

A FRIEND OF THE COMMUNE

"See, madame—there, on the Hill of Pains, the long finger of the Semaphore! One more prisoner has escaped—one more."

"One more, Marie. It is the life here—that on the Hill, this here below; and yet the sun is bright, the cockatoos are laughing in the palms, and you hear my linnet singing."

"It turns so slowly. Now it points across the Winter Valley. Ah!"

"Yes, across the Winter Valley, where the deep woods are, and beyond to the Pascal River."

"Towards my home. How dim the light is now! I can only see It—like a long dark finger yonder."

"No, my dear, there is bright sunshine still; there is no cloud at all: but It *is* like a finger; it is quivering now, as though it were not sure."

"Thank God, if it be not sure! But the hill is cloudy, as I said."

"No, Marie. How droll you are! The hill is not cloudy; even at this distance one can see something glisten beside the grove of pines."

"I know. It is the White Rock, where King Ovi died."

"Marie, turn your face to me. Your eyes are full of tears. Your heart is tender. Your tears are for the prisoner who has escaped—the hunted in the chase."

She shuddered a little and added, "Wherever he is, that long dark finger on the Hill of Pains will find him out—the remorseless Semaphore."

"No, madame, I am selfish; I weep for myself. Tell me truly, as—as if I were your own child—was there no cloud, no sudden darkness, out there, as we looked towards the Hill of Pains."

"None, dear."

"Then—then—madame, I suppose it was my tears that blinded me for the moment."

"No doubt it was your tears."

But each said in her heart that it was not tears; each said: "Let not this thing come, O God!" Presently, with a caress, the elder woman left the room; but the girl remained to watch that gloomy thing upon the Hill of Pains.

As she stood there, with her fingers clasped upon a letter she had drawn from her pocket, a voice from among the palms outside floated towards her.

"He escaped last night; the Semaphore shows that they have got upon his track. I suppose they'll try to converge upon him before he gets to Pascal River. Once there he might have a chance of escape; but he'll need a lot of luck, poor devil!"

Marie's fingers tightened on the letter.

Then another voice replied, and it brought a flush to the cheek of the girl, a hint of trouble to her eyes. It said: "Is Miss Wyndham here still?"

"Yes, still here. My wife will be distressed when she leaves us."

"She will not care to go, I should think. The Hotel du Gouverneur spoils us for all other places in New Caledonia."

"You are too kind, monsieur; I fear that those who think as you are not many. After all, I am little more here than a gaoler—merely a gaoler, M. Tryon."

"Yet, the Commandant of a military station and the Governor of a Colony."

"The station is a penitentiary; the colony for *libérés*, ticket-of-leave men, and outcast Paris; with a sprinkling of gentlemen and officers dying of boredom. No, my friend, we French are not colonists. We emigrate, we do not colonise. This is no colony. We do no good here."

"You forget the nickel mines."

"Quarries for the convicts and for political prisoners of the lowest class."

"The plantations?"

"Ah, there I crave your pardon. You are a planter, but you are English. M. Wyndham is a planter and an owner of mines, but he is English. The man who has done best financially in New Caledonia is an Englishman. You, and a few others like you, French and English, are the only colony I have. I do not rule you; you help me to rule."

"We?"

"By being on the side of justice and public morality; by dining with me, though all too seldom; by giving me a quiet hour now and then beneath your vines and fig-trees; and so making this uniform less burdensome to carry. No, no, monsieur, I know you are about to say something very gracious: but no, you shall pay your compliments to the ladies."

As they journeyed to the morning-room Hugh Tryon said: "Does M. Laflamme still come to paint Miss Wyndham?"

"Yes; but it ends to-morrow, and then no more of that. Prisoners are prisoners, and though Laflamme is agreeable that makes it the more difficult."

"Why should he be treated so well, as a first-class

prisoner, and others of the Commune be so degraded here—as Mayer, for instance?"

"It is but a question of degree. He was an artist and something of a dramatist; he was not at the Place Vendôme at a certain critical moment; he was not at Montmartre at a particular terrible time; he was not a high officer like Mayer; he was young, with the face of a patriot. Well, they sent Mayer to the galleys at Toulon first; then, among the worst of the prisoners here—he was too bold, too full of speech; he had not Laflamme's gift of silence, of pathos. Mayer works coarsely, severely here; Laflamme grows his vegetables, idles about Ducos, swings in his hammock, and appears at inspections the picture of docility. One day he sent to me the picture of my wife framed in gold—here it is. Is it not charming? The size of a franc-piece and so perfect! You know the soft hearts of women."

"You mean that Madame Solde—"

"She persuaded me to let him come here to paint my portrait. He has done so, and now he paints Marie Wyndham. But—"

"But?— Yes?"

"But these things have their dangers."

"Have their dangers," Hugh Tryon musingly repeated, and then added under his breath almost, "Escape or—"

"Or something else," the Governor rather sharply interrupted; and then, as they were entering the room, gaily continued: "Ah, here we come, mademoiselle, to pay—"

"To pay your surplus of compliments, monsieur le Gouverneur. I could not help but hear something of what you said," responded Marie, and gave her hand to Tryon.

"I leave you to mademoiselle's tender mercies, monsieur," said the Governor. "*Au revoir!*"

When he had gone, Hugh said: "You are gay today."

"Indeed, no, I am sad."

"Wherefore sad? Is nickel proving a drug? Or sugar a failure? Don't tell me that your father says sugar is falling." He glanced at the letter, which she unconsciously held in her hand.

She saw his look, smoothed the letter a little nervously between her palms, and put it into her pocket, saying: "No, my father has not said that sugar is falling—but come here, will you?" and she motioned towards the open window. When there, she said slowly, "That is what makes me sad and sorry," and she pointed to the Semaphore upon the Hill of Pains.

"You are too tender-hearted," he remarked. "A convict has escaped; he will be caught perhaps—perhaps not; and things will go on as before."

"Will go on as before. That is, the *martinet* worse than the *knout de Russe ;* the *poucettes*, the *crapaudine* on neck and ankles and wrists; all, all as bad as the *Pater Noster* of the Inquisition, as Mayer said the other day in the face of Charpentier, the Commandant of the penitentiary. How pleasant also to think of the Boulevard de Guillotine! I tell you it is brutal, horrible. Think of what prisoners have to suffer here, whose only crime is that they were of the Commune; that they were just a little madder than other Frenchmen."

"Pardon me if I say that as brutal things were done by the English in Tasmania."

"Think of two hundred and sixty strokes of the 'cat.'"

"You concern yourself too much about these things, I fear."

"I only think that death would be easier than the life of half of the convicts here."

"They themselves would prefer it, perhaps."

"Tell me, who is the convict that has escaped?" she feverishly asked. "Is it a political prisoner?"

"You would not know him. He was one of the Commune who escaped shooting in the Place de la Concorde. Carbourd, I think, was his name."

"Carbourd, Carbourd," she repeated, and turned her head away towards the Semaphore.

Her earnestness aroused in Tryon a sudden flame of sympathy which had its origin, as he well knew, in three years of growing love. This love leaped up now determinedly—perhaps unwisely; but what should a blunt soul like Hugh Tryon know regarding the best or worst time to seek a woman's heart? He came close to her now and said: "If you are so kind in thought for a convict, I dare hope that you would be more kind to me."

"Be kind to you," she repeated, as if not understanding what he said, nor the look in his eyes.

"For I am a prisoner, too."

"A prisoner?" she rejoined a little tremulously, and coldly.

"In your hands, Marie." His eyes laid bare his heart.

"Oh!" she replied, in a half-troubled, half-indignant tone, for she was out of touch with the occasion of his suit, and every woman has in her mind the time when she should and when she should not be wooed. "Oh, why aren't you plain with me? I hate enigmas."

"Why do I not speak plainly? Because, because,

Marie, it is possible for a man to be a coward in his speech"—he touched her fingers—"when he loves."

She quickly drew her hand from his. "Oh, can't we be friends without *that?*"

There was a sound of footsteps at the window. Both turned, and saw the political prisoner, Rive Laflamme, followed by a guard.

"He comes to finish my portrait," she said. "This is the last sitting."

"Marie, must I go like this? When may I see you again? When will you answer me? You will not make all the hopes to end here?"

It was evident that some deep trouble was on the girl. She flushed hotly, as if she were about to reply hotly also, but she changed quickly, and said, not unkindly: "When M. Laflamme has gone." And now, as if repenting of her unreasonable words of a moment before, she added: "Oh, please don't think me hard. I am sorry that I grieve you. I'm afraid I am not altogether well, not altogether happy."

"I will wait till he has gone," the planter replied. At the door he turned as if to say something, but he only looked steadily, sadly at her, and then was gone.

She stood where he had left her, gazing in melancholy abstraction at the door through which he had passed. There were footsteps without in the hall-way. The door was opened, and a servant announced M. Laflamme. The painter-prisoner entered followed by the soldier. Immediately afterward Mrs. Angers, Marie's elderly companion, sidled in gently.

Laflamme bowed low, then turned and said coolly to the soldier: "You may wait outside to-day, Roupet. This is my last morning's work. It is important, and

you splutter and cough. You are too exhausting for a studio."

But Roupet answered: "Monsieur, I have my orders."

"Nonsense. This is the Governor's house. I am perfectly safe here. Give your orders a change of scene. You would better enjoy the refreshing coolness of the corridors this morning. You won't? Oh, yes, you will. Here's a cigarette—there, take the whole bunch—I paid too much for them, but no matter. Ah, pardon me, mademoiselle. I forgot that you cannot smoke here, Roupet; but you shall have them all the same, there! *Parbleu!* you are a handsome rascal, if you weren't so wheezy! Come, come, Roupet, make yourself invisible."

The eyes of the girl were on the soldier. They did the work better; a warrior has a soft place in his heart for a beautiful woman. He wheeled suddenly, and disappeared from the room, motioning that he would remain at the door.

The painting began, and for half an hour or more was continued without a word. In the silence the placid Angers had fallen asleep.

Nodding slightly towards her, Rive Laflamme said in a low voice to Marie: "Her hearing at its best is not remarkable?"

"Not remarkable."

He spoke more softly. "That is good. Well, the portrait is done. It has been the triumph of my life to paint it. Not that first joy I had when I won the great prize in Paris equals it. I am glad: and yet—and yet there was much chance that it would never be finished."

"Why?"

"Carbourd is gone."

"Yes, I know—well?"

"Well, I should be gone also were it not for this portrait. The chance came. I was tempted. I determined to finish this. I stayed."

"Do you think that he will be caught?"

"Not alive. Carbourd has suffered too much—the galleys, the *corde*, the triangle, everything but the guillotine. Carbourd has a wife and children—ah, yes, you know all about it. You remember that letter she sent: I can recall every word; can you?"

The girl paused, and then with a rapt sympathy in her face repeated slowly: "*I am ill, and our children cry for food. The wife calls to her husband, my darlings say, 'Will father never come home?'*"

Marie's eyes were moist.

"Mademoiselle, he was no common criminal. He would have died for the cause grandly. He loved France too wildly. That was his sin."

"Carbourd is free," she said, as though to herself.

"He has escaped." His voice was the smallest whisper. "And now my time has come."

"When? And where do you go?"

"To-night, and to join Carbourd, if I can, at the Pascal River. At King Ovi's Cave, if possible."

The girl was very pale. She turned and looked at Angers, who still slept. "And then?"

"And then, as I have said to you before, to the coast, to board the *Parroquet*, which will lie off the island Saint Jerome three days from now to carry us away into freedom. It is all arranged by our 'Underground Railway.'"

"And you tell me all this—why?" the girl said falteringly.

"Because you said that you would not let a hunted

fugitive starve; that you would give us horses, with which we could travel the Brocken Path across the hills. Here is the plan of the river that you drew; at this point is the King's Cave which you discovered, and is known only to yourself."

"I ought not to have given it to you; but—"

"Ah, you will not repent of a noble action, of a great good to me—Marie?"

"Hush, monsieur. Indeed, you may not speak to me so. You forget. I am sorry for you; I think you do not deserve this—banishment; you are unhappy here; and I told you of the King's Cave—that was all."

"Ah no, that is not all! To be free, that is good; but only that I may be a man again; that I may love my art—and you; that I may once again be proud of France."

"Monsieur, I repeat, you must not speak so. Do not take advantage of my willingness to serve you."

"A thousand pardons! but that was in my heart, and I hoped, I hoped—"

"You must not hope. I can only know you as M. Laflamme, the—"

"The political convict; ah, yes, I know," he said bitterly: "a convict over whom the knout is held; who may at any moment be shot down like a hare: who has but two prayers in all the world: to be free in France once more, and to be loved by one—"

She interrupted him: "Your first prayer is natural."

"Natural?—Do you know what song we sang in the cages of the ship that carried us into this evil exile here? Do you know what brought tears to the eyes of the guards?—What made the captain and the sailors turn their heads away from us, lest we should see that their faces were wet? What rendered the soldiers who had

fought us in the Commune more human for the moment? It was this:

"'Adieu, patrie!
L'onde est en furie,
Adieu patrie,
Azur!
Adieu, maison, treille au fruit mûr,

Adieu les fruits d'or du vieux mûr!
Adieu, patrie,
Ciel, forêt, prairie;
Adieu patrie,
Azur.'"

"Hush, monsieur!" the girl said with a swift gesture.

He looked and saw that Angers was waking. "If I live," he hurriedly whispered, "I shall be at the King's Cave to-morrow night. And you—the horses?"

"You shall have my help and the horses." Then, more loudly: "*Au revoir*, monsieur."

At that moment Madame Solde entered the room. She acknowledged Laflamme's presence gravely.

"It is all done, madame," he said, pointing to the portrait.

Madame Solde bowed coldly, but said: "It is very well done, monsieur."

"It is my masterpiece," remarked the painter pensively. "Will you permit me to say adieu, mesdames? I go to join my amiable and attentive companion, Roupet the guard." He bowed himself out.

Madame Solde drew Marie aside. Angers discreetly left.

The Governor's wife drew the girl's head back on her shoulder. "Marie," she said, "M. Tryon does not seem happy; cannot you change that?"

With quivering lips the girl laid her head on the Frenchwoman's breast, and said: "Ah, do not ask me now. Madame, I am going home to-day."

"To-day? But, so soon!—I wished—"

"I must go to-day."

"But we had hoped you would stay while M. Tryon—"

"M. Tryon—will—go with me—perhaps."

"Ah, my dear Marie!" The woman kissed the girl, and wondered.

That afternoon Marie was riding across the Winter Valley to her father's plantation at the Pascal River. Angers was driving ahead. Beside Marie rode Tryon silent and attentive. Arrived at the homestead, she said to him in the shadow of the *naoulis:* "Hugh Tryon, what would you do to prove the love you say you have for me?"

"All that a man could do I would do."

"Can you see the Semaphore from here?"

"Yes, there it is clear against the sky—look!"

But the girl did not look. She touched her eyelids with her finger-tips, as though they were fevered, and then said: "Many have escaped. They are searching for Carbourd and—"

"Yes, Marie?"

"And M. Laflamme—"

"Laflamme!" he said sharply. Then, noticing how at his brusqueness the paleness of her face changed to a startled flush for an instant, his generosity conquered, and he added gently: "Well, I fancied he would try, but what do you know about that, Marie?"

"He and Carbourd were friends. They were chained together in the galleys, they lived—at first—together here. They would risk life to return to France."

"Tell me," said he, "what do you know of this? What is it to you?"

"You wish to know all before you will do what I ask."

"I will do anything you ask, because you will not ask of me what is unmanly."

"M. Laflamme will escape to-night if possible, and join Carbourd on the Pascal River, at a safe spot that I know." She told him of the Cave.

"Yes, yes, I understand. You would help him. And I?"

"You will help me. You will?"

There was a slight pause, and then he said: "Yes, I will. But think what this is to an Englishman—to yourself, to be accomplice to the escape of a French prisoner."

"I gave a promise to a man whom I think deserves it. He believed he was a patriot. If you were in that case, and I were a Frenchwoman, I would do the same for you."

He smiled rather grimly and said: "If it please you that this man escape, I shall hope he may, and will help you. . . . Here comes your father."

"I could not let my father know," she said. "He has no sympathy for any one like that, for any one at all, I think, but me."

"Don't be down-hearted. If you have set your heart on this, I will try to bring it about, God knows! Now let us be less gloomy. Conspirators should smile. That is the cue. Besides, the world is bright. Look at the glow upon the hills."

"I suppose the Semaphore is glistening on the Hill of Pains; but I cannot see it."

He did not understand her.

II

A FEW hours after this conversation, Laflamme sought to accomplish his escape. He had lately borne a letter from the Commandant, which permitted him to go from point to point outside the peninsula of Ducos, where the least punished of the political prisoners were kept. He depended somewhat on this for his escape. Carbourd had been more heroic, but then Carbourd was desperate. Laflamme believed more in ability than force. It was ability and money that had won over the captain of the *Parroquet*, coupled with the connivance of an old member of the Commune, who was now a guard. This night there was increased alertness, owing to the escape of Carbourd; and himself, if not more closely watched, was at least open to quick suspicion owing to his known friendship for Carbourd. He strolled about the fortified enclosure, chatting to fellow prisoners, and waiting for the call which should summon them to the huts. Through years of studied good-nature he had come to be regarded as a contented prisoner. He had no enemies save one among the guards. This man Maillot he had offended by thwarting his continued ill-treatment of a young lad who had been one of the condemned of the Commune, and whose hammock, at last, by order of the Commandant, was slung in Laflamme's hut. For this kindness and interposition the lad was grateful and devoted. He had been set to labour in the nickel mines; but that came near to killing him, and again through Laflamme's pleading he had been made a prisoner of the first class, and so relieved of all heavy tasks. Not even he suspected

the immediate relations of Laflamme and Carbourd; nor that Laflamme was preparing for escape.

As Laflamme waited for the summons to huts, a squad of prisoners went clanking by him, manacled. They had come from road-making. These never heard from wife nor child, nor held any commerce with the outside world, nor had any speech with each other, save by a silent gesture-language which eluded the vigilance of the guards. As the men passed, Laflamme looked at them steadily. They knew him well. Some of them remembered his speeches at the Place Vendôme. They bore him no ill-will that he did not suffer as they. He made a swift sign to a prisoner near the rear of the column. The man smiled, but gave no answering token. This was part of the unspoken vocabulary, and, in this instance, conveyed the two words: *I escape.*

A couple of hours later Laflamme rose from a hammock in his hut, and leant over the young lad, who was sleeping. He touched him gently.

The lad waked: "Yes, yes, monsieur."

"I am going away, my friend."

"To escape like Carbourd?"

"Yes, I hope, like Carbourd."

"May I not go also, monsieur? I am not afraid."

"No, lad. If there must be death one is enough. You must stay. Good-bye."

"You will see my mother? She is old, and she grieves."

"Yes, I will see your mother. And more; you shall be free. I will see to that. Be patient, little comrade. Nay, nay, hush! . . . No, thanks. Adieu!" He put his hands on the lad's shoulder and kissed his forehead.

"I wish I had died at the Barricades. But, yes, I will be brave—be sure of that."

"You shall not die—you shall live in France, which is better. Once more, adieu!" Laflamme passed out. It was raining. He knew that if he could satisfy the first sentinel he should stand a better chance of escape, since he had had so much freedom of late; and to be passed by one would help with others. He went softly, but he was soon challenged.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Condemned of the Commune—by order."

"Whose order?"

"That of the Commandant."

"Advance order."

The sentinel knew him. "Ah, Laflamme," he said, and raised the point of his bayonet. The paper was produced. It did not entitle him to go about at night, and certainly not beyond the enclosure without a guard —it was insufficient. In unfolding the paper Laflamme purposely dropped it in the mud. He hastily picked it up, and, in doing so, smeared it. He wiped it, leaving the signature comparatively plain—nothing else.

"Well," said the sentinel, "the signature is right. Where do you go?"

"To Government House."

"I do not know that I should let you pass. But—well, look out that the next sentinel doesn't bayonet you. You came on me suddenly."

The next sentinel was a Kanaka. The previous formula was repeated. The Kanaka examined the paper long, and then said: "You cannot pass."

"But the other sentinel passed me. Would you get him into trouble?"

The Kanaka frowned, hesitated, then said: "That is another matter. Well, pass."

Twice more the same formula and arguments were

used. At last he heard a voice in challenge that he knew. It was that of Maillot. This was a more difficult game. His order was taken with a malicious sneer by the sentinel. At that instant Laflamme threw his arms swiftly round the other, clapped a hand on his mouth, and, with a dexterous twist of leg, threw him backward, till it seemed as if the spine of the soldier must break. It was impossible to struggle against this trick of wrestling, which Laflamme had learned from a famous Cornish wrestler, in a summer spent on the English coast.

"If you shout or speak I will kill you!" he said to Maillot, and then dropped him heavily on the ground, where he lay senseless. Laflamme stooped down and felt his heart. "Alive!" he said, then seized the rifle and plunged into the woods. The moon at that moment broke through the clouds, and he saw the Semaphore like a ghost pointing towards Pascal River. He waved his hand towards his old prison, and sped away.

But others were thinking of the Semaphore at this moment, others saw it indistinct, yet melancholy, in the moonlight. The Governor and his wife saw it, and Madame Solde said: "Alfred, I shall be glad when I shall see that no more."

"You have too much feeling."

"I suppose Marie makes me think more of it to-day. She wept this morning over all this misery and punishment."

"You think that. Well, perhaps something more—"

"What more?"

"Laflamme."

"No, no, it is impossible!"

"Indeed it is as I say. My wife, you are blind. I

chanced to see him with her yesterday. I should have prevented him coming to-day, but I knew it was his last day with the portrait, and that all should end here."

"We have done wrong in this—the poor child! Besides, she has, I fear, another sorrow coming. It showed itself to me to-day for the first time." Then she whispered to him, and he started and sighed, and said at last:

"But it must be saved. By —! it shall be saved!"

And at that moment Marie Wyndham was standing in the open window of the library of Pascal House. She had been thinking of her recent visit to the King's Cave, where she had left food, and of the fact that Carbourd was not there. She raised her face towards the moon and sighed. She was thinking of something else. She was not merely sentimental, for she said, as if she had heard the words of the Governor and Madame Solde: "Oh! if it could be saved!"

There was a rustle in the shrubbery near her. She turned towards the sound. A man came quickly towards her. "I am Carbourd," he said; "I could not find the way to the Cave. They were after me. They have tracked me. Tell me quick how to go."

She swiftly gave him directions, and he darted away. Again there was a rustle in the leaves, and a man stepped forth. Something glistened in his hands —a rifle, though she could not see it plainly. It was levelled at the flying figure of Carbourd. There was a report. Marie started forward with her hands on her temples and a sharp cry. She started forward—into absolute darkness. There was a man's footsteps going swiftly by her. Why was it so dark? She stretched out her hands with a moan.

"Oh! mother!—oh! mother! I am blind!" she cried.

But her mother was sleeping unresponsive beyond the dark—beyond all dark. It was, perhaps, natural that she should cry to the dead and not to the living.

Marie was blind. She had known it was coming, and it had tried her, as it would have tried any of the race of women. She had, when she needed it most, put love from her, and would not let her own heart speak, even to herself. She had sought to help one who loved her, and to fully prove the other—though the proving, she knew, was not necessary—before the darkness came. But here it was suddenly sent upon her by the shock of a rifle shot. It would have sent a shudder to a stronger heart than hers—that, in reply to her call on her dead mother, there came from the trees the shrill laugh of the mopoke—the sardonic bird of the South.

As she stood there, with this tragedy enveloping her, the dull boom of a cannon came across the valley. "From Ducos," she said. "M. Laflamme has escaped. God help us all!" And she turned and groped her way into the room she had left.

She felt for a chair and sat down. She must think of what she now was. She wondered if Carbourd was killed. She listened and thought not, since there was no sound without. But she knew that the house would be roused. She bowed her head in her hands. Surely she might weep a little for herself—she who had been so troubled for others. It is strange, but she thought of her flowers and birds, and wondered how she should tend them; of her own room which faced the north—the English north that she loved so well; of her horse, and marvelled if he would know that she could not see

him; and, lastly, of a widening horizon of pain, spread before the eyes of her soul, in which her father and another moved.

It seemed to her that she sat there for hours, it was in reality minutes only. A firm step and the opening of a door roused her. She did not turn her head—what need? She knew the step. There was almost a touch of ironical smiling at her lips, as she thought how she must hear and feel things only, in the future. A voice said: "Marie, are you here?"

"I am here."

"I'll strike a match so that you can see I'm not a bushranger. There has been shooting in the grounds. Did you hear it?"

"Yes. A soldier firing at Carbourd."

"You saw him?"

"Yes. He could not find the Cave. I directed him. Immediately after he was fired upon."

"He can't have been hit. There are no signs of him. There, that's lighter and better, isn't it?"

"I do not know."

She had risen, but she did not turn towards him. He came nearer to her. The enigmatical tone struck him strangely, but he could find nothing less commonplace to say than: "You don't prefer the exaggerated gloaming, do you?"

"No, I do not prefer the gloaming, but why should not one be patient?"

"Be patient!" he repeated, and came nearer still. "Are you hurt or angry?"

"I am hurt, but not angry."

"What have I done?—or is it I?"

"It is not you. You are very good. It is nobody but God. I am hurt, because He is angry, perhaps."

"Tell me what is the matter. Look at me." He faced her now—faced her eyes, looking blindly straight before her.

"Hugh," she said, and she put her hand out slightly, not exactly to him, but as if to protect him from the blow which she herself must deal: "I am looking at you now."

"Yes, yes, but so strangely, and not in my eyes."

"I cannot look into your eyes, because, Hugh, I am blind." Her hand went further out towards him.

He took it silently and pressed it to his bosom as he saw that she spoke true; and the shadow of the thing fell on him. The hand held to his breast felt how he was trembling from the shock.

"Sit down, Hugh," she said, "and I will tell you all; but do not hold my hand so, or I cannot."

Sitting there face to face, with deep furrows growing in his countenance, and a quiet sorrow spreading upon her cheek and forehead, she told the story how, since her childhood, her sight had played her false now and then, and within the past month had grown steadily uncertain. "And now," she said at last, "I am blind. I think I should like to tell my father—if you please. Then when I have seen him and poor Angers, if you will come again! There is work to be done. I hoped it would be finished before this came; but—there, good friend, go; I will sit here quietly."

She could not see his face, but she heard him say: "My love, my love," very softly, as he rose to go; and she smiled sadly to herself. She folded her hands in her lap, and thought, not bitterly, not listlessly, but deeply. She wanted to consider all cheerfully now; she tried to do so. She was musing among those flying perceptions, those nebulous facts of a new life,

experienced for the first time; she was now not herself as she had been; another woman was born; and she was feeling carefully along the unfamiliar paths which she must tread. She was not glad that these words ran through her mind continuously at first:

"*A land of darkness as darkness itself, and of the shadow of death without any order, and where the light is darkness.*"

Her brave nature rose against the moody spirit which sought to take possession of her, and she cried out in her heart valiantly: "But there is order, there *is* order. I shall *feel* things as they ought to be. I think I could tell now what was true and what was false in man or woman; it would be in their presence not in their faces."

She stopped speaking. She heard footsteps. Her father entered. Hugh Tryon had done his task gently, but the old planter, selfish and hard as he was, loved his daughter; and the meeting was bitter for him. The prop of his pride seemed shaken beyond recovery. But the girl's calm comforted them all, and poignancy became dull pain. Before parting for the night Marie said to Hugh: "This is what I wish you to do for me: to bring over two of your horses to Point Assumption on the river. There is a glen beyond that as you know, and from it runs the steep and dangerous Brocken Path across the hills. I wish you to wait there until M. Laflamme and Carbourd come by the river—that is their only chance. If they get across the hills they can easily reach the sea. I know that two of your horses have been over the path; they are sure-footed; they would know it in the night. Is it not so?"

"It is so. There are not a dozen horses in the colony that could be trusted on it at night, but mine are safe. I shall do all you wish."

She put out both her hands and felt for his shoulders, and let them rest there for a moment, saying: "I ask much, and I can give no reward, except the gratitude of one who would rather die than break a promise. It isn't much, but it is all that is worth your having. Good-night. Good-bye."

"Good-night. Good-bye," he gently replied; but he said something beneath his breath that sounded worth the hearing.

The next morning while her father was gone to consult the chief army-surgeon at Noumea, Marie strolled with Angers in the grounds. At length she said: "Angers, take me to the river, and then on down, until we come to the high banks." With her hand on Angers' arm, and in her face that passive gentleness which grows so sweetly from sightless eyes till it covers all the face, they passed slowly towards the river. When they came to the higher banks covered with dense scrub, Angers paused, and told Marie where they were.

"Find me the she-oak tree," the girl said; "there is only one, you know."

"Here it is, my dear. There, your hand is on it now."

"Thank you. Wait here, Angers, I shall be back presently."

"But oh, my dear—"

"Please do as I say, Angers, and do not worry." The girl pushed aside some bushes, and was lost to view. She pressed along vigilantly by a descending path, until her feet touched rocky ground. She nodded to herself, then creeping between two bits of jutting rock at her right, immediately stood at the entrance to a cave, hidden completely from the river

and from the banks above. At the entrance, for which she felt, she paused and said aloud: "Is there any one here?" Something clicked far within the cave. It sounded like a rifle. Then stealthy steps were heard, and a voice said:

"Ah, mademoiselle!"

"You are Carbourd?"

"As you see, mademoiselle."

"You escaped safely then from the rifle-shot? Where is the soldier?"

"He fell into the river. He was drowned."

"You are telling me truth?"

"Yes, he stumbled in and sank—on my soul!"

"You did not try to save him?"

"He lied and got me six months in irons once; he called down on my back one hundred and fifty lashes, a year ago; he had me kept on bread and water, and degraded to the fourth class, where I could never hear from my wife and children—never write to them. I lost one eye in the quarries because he made me stand too near a lighted fuse—"

"Poor man, poor man!" she said. "You found the food I left here?"

"Yes, God bless you! And my wife and children will bless you too, if I see France again."

"You know where the boat is?"

"I know, mademoiselle."

"When you reach Point Assumption you will find horses there to take you across the Brocken Path. M. Laflamme knows. I hope that you will both escape; that you will be happy in France with your wife and children."

"You will not come here again?"

"No. If M. Laflamme should not arrive, and you

should go alone, leave one pair of oars; then I shall know. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, mademoiselle. A thousand times I will pray for you. Ah, *mon Dieu!* take care!—you are on the edge of the great tomb."

She stood perfectly still. At her feet was a dark excavation where was the skeleton of Ovi the King. This was the hidden burial-place of the modern Hiawatha of these savage islands, unknown even to the natives themselves, and kept secret with a half-superstitious reverence by this girl, who had discovered it a few months before.

"I had forgotten," she said. "Please take my hand and set me right at the entrance."

"Your hand, mademoiselle? Mine is so—! It is not dark."

"I am blind now."

"Blind—blind! Oh, the pitiful thing! Since when, mademoiselle?"

"Since the soldier fired on you—the shock. . . ."

The convict knelt at her feet. "Ah, mademoiselle, you are a good angel. I shall die of grief. To think —for such as me!"

"You will live to love your wife and children. This is the will of God with me. Am I in the path now?—Ah, thank you."

"But, M. Laflamme—this will be a great sorrow to him."

Twice she seemed about to speak, but nothing came save good-bye. Then she crept cautiously away among the bushes and along the narrow path, the eyes of the convict following her. She had done a deed which, she understood, the world would blame her for if it knew, would call culpable or foolishly heroic; but she

smiled, because she understood also that she had done that which her own conscience and heart approved, and she was content.

At this time Laflamme was stealing watchfully through the tropical scrub, where hanging vines tore his hands, and the sickening perfume of jungle flowers overcame him more than the hard journey which he had undergone during the past twelve hours.

Several times he had been within voice of his pursuers, and once a Kanaka scout passed close to him. He had had nothing to eat, he had had no sleep, he suffered from a wound in his neck caused by the broken protruding branch of a tree; but he had courage, and he was struggling for liberty—a tolerably sweet thing when one has it not. He found the Cave at last, and with far greater ease than Carbourd had done, because he knew the ground better, and his instinct was keener. His greeting to Carbourd was nonchalantly cordial:

"Well, you see, comrade, King Ovi's Cave is a reality."

"So."

"I saw the boat. The horses? What do you know?"

"They will be at Point Assumption to-night."

"Then we go to-night. We shall have to run the chances of rifles along the shore at a range something short, but we have done that before, at the Barricades, eh, Carbourd?"

"At the Barricades. It is a pity that we cannot take Citizen Louise Michel with us."

"Her time will come."

"She has no children crying and starving at home like—"

"Like yours, Carbourd, like yours. Well, I am starving here. Give me something to eat. . . . Ah, that is good—excellent! What more can we want but freedom! Till the darkness of tyranny be overpast—overpast, eh?"

This speech brought another weighty matter to Carbourd's mind. He said:

"I do not wish to distress you, but—"

"Now, Carbourd, what is the matter? Faugh! this place smells musty. What's that—a tomb? Speak out, Citizen Carbourd."

"It is this: Mademoiselle Wyndham is blind." Carbourd told the story with a great anxiety in his words.

"The poor mademoiselle—is it so? A thousand pities! So kind, so young, so beautiful. Ah, I am distressed, and I finished her portrait yesterday! Yes, I remember her eyes looked too bright, and then again too dull: but I thought that it was excitement, and so —that!"

Laflamme's regret was real enough up to a certain point, but, in sincerity and value, it was chasms below that of Hugh Tryon, who, even now, was getting two horses ready to give the Frenchmen their chance.

After a pause Laflamme said: "She will not come here again, Carbourd? No? Ah, well, perhaps it is better so; but I should have liked to speak my thanks to her."

That night Marie sat by the window of the sitting-room, with the light burning, and Angers asleep in a chair beside her—sat till long after midnight, in the thought that Laflamme, if he had reached the Cave, would, perhaps, dare something to see her and bid her

good-bye. She would of course have told him not to come, but he was chivalrous, and then her blindness would touch him. Yet as the hours went by the thought came: was he, was he so chivalrous? was he altogether true? . . . He did not come. The next morning Angers took her to where the boat had been, but it was gone, and no oars were left behind. So, both had sought escape in it.

She went to the Cave. She took Angers with her now. Upon the wall a paper was found. It was a note from M. Laflamme. She asked Angers to give it to her without reading it. She put it in her pocket and kept it there until she should see Hugh Tryon. He should read it to her. She said to herself as she felt the letter in her pocket: "He loved me. It was the least that I could do. I am so glad." Yet she was not altogether glad either, and disturbing thoughts crossed the parallels of her pleasure.

The Governor and Madame Solde first brought news of the complete escape of the prisoners. The two had fled through the hills by the Brocken Path, and though pursued after crossing, had reached the coast, and were taken aboard the *Parroquet*, which sailed away towards Australia. It is probable that Marie's visitors had their suspicions regarding the escape, but they said nothing, and did not make her uncomfortable. Just now they were most concerned for her bitter misfortune. Madame Solde said to her: "My poor Marie—does it feel so dreadful, so dark?"

"No, madame, it is not so bad. There are so many things which one does not wish to see, and one is spared the pain."

"But you will see again. When you go to England, to great physicians there."

"Then I should have three lives, madame: when I could see, when sight died, and when sight was born again. How wise I should be!"

They left her sadly, and after a time she heard footsteps that she knew. She came forward and greeted Tryon.

"Ah," she said, "all's well with them, I know; and you were so good."

"They are safe upon the seas," he gently replied, and he kissed her hand.

"Now you will read this letter for me. M. Laflamme left it behind in the Cave."

With a pang he took it, and read thus:

DEAR FRIEND,—My grief for your misfortune is inexpressible. If it were possible I should say so in person, but there is danger, and we must fly at once. You shall hear from me in full gratitude when I am in safety. I owe you so many thanks, as I give you so much of devotion. But there is the future for all. Mademoiselle, I kiss your hand.

Always yours,
RIVE LAFLAMME.

"Hugh!" she said sadly when he had finished, "I seem to have new knowledge of things, now that I am blind. I think this letter is not altogether real. You see, that was his way of saying—good-bye."

What Hugh Tryon thought, he did not say. He had met the Governor on his way to Pascal House, and had learned some things which were not for her to know.

She continued: "I could not bear that one who was innocent of any real crime, who was a great artist, and who believed himself a patriot, should suffer so here. When he asked me I helped him. Yet I suppose I was selfish, wasn't I? It was because he loved me."

Hugh spoke breathlessly: "And because—you loved him, Marie?"

Her head was lifted quickly, as though she saw, and was looking him in the eyes. "Oh no, oh no," she cried, "I never loved him. I was sorry for him—that was all."

"Marie, Marie," he said gently, while she shook her head a little pitifully, "did you, then, love any one else?"

She was silent for a space and then she said: "Yes—Oh, Hugh, I am so sorry for your sake that I am blind, and cannot marry you."

"But, my darling, you shall not always be blind, you shall see again. And you shall marry me also. As though—life of my life! as though one's love could live but by the sight of the eyes!"

"My poor Hugh! But, blind, I could not marry you. It would not be just to you."

He smiled with a happy hopeful determination; "But if you should see again?"

"Oh, then. . . ."

She married him, and in time her sight returned, though not completely. Tryon never told her, as the Governor had told him, that Rive Laflamme, when a prisoner in New Caledonia, had a wife in Paris: and he is man enough to hope that she may never know.

But to this hour he has a profound regret that duels are not in vogue among Englishmen.

A PAGAN OF THE SOUTH

A PAGAN OF THE SOUTH

I

When Blake Shorland stepped from the steamer *Belle Sauvage* upon the quay at Noumea, he proceeded, with the alertness of the trained newspaper correspondent, to take his bearings. So this was New Caledonia, the home of outcast, criminal France, the recent refuge of Communist exiles, of Rochefort, Louise Michel, Felix Rastoul, and the rest! Over there to the left was Ile Nou, the convict prison; on the hill was the Governor's residence; below, the Government establishments with their red-tiled roofs; and hidden away in a luxuriance of tropical vegetation lay the houses of the citizens. He stroked his black moustache thoughtfully for a moment, and put his hand to his pocket to see that his letters of introduction from the French Consul at Sydney to Governor Rapont and his journalistic credentials were there. Then he remembered the advice of the captain of the *Belle Sauvage* as to the best hotel, and started towards it. He had not been shown the way, but his instincts directed him. He knew where it ought to be, according to the outlines of the place.

It proved to be where he thought, and, having engaged rooms, sent for his luggage, and refreshed himself, he set out to explore the town. His prudent mind told him that he ought to proceed at once to Governor Rapont and present his letters of commendation, for he was in a country where feeling was running

high against English interference with the deportation of French convicts to New Caledonia, and the intention of France to annex the New Hebrides. But he knew also that so soon as these letters were presented, his freedom of action would be restricted, either by a courtesy which would be so constant as to become surveillance, or by an injunction having no such gloss. He had come to study French government in New Caledonia, to gauge the extent of the menace that the convict question bore towards Australia, and to tell his tale to Australia, and to such other countries as would listen. The task was not pleasant, and it had its dangers, too, of a certain kind. But Shorland had had difficulty and peril often in his life, and he borrowed no trouble. Proceeding along the Rue de l'Alma, and listening to the babble of French voices round him, he suddenly paused abstractedly, and said to himself: "Somehow it brings back Paris to me, and that last night there, when I bade Freeman good-bye. Poor old boy, I'm glad better days are coming for him. Sure to be better, if he marries Clare. Why didn't he do it seven years ago, and save all that other horrible business?"

Then he moved on, noticing that he was the object of remark, but as it was daytime, and in the street he felt himself safe. Glancing up at a doorway he saw a familiar Paris name—*Café Voisin*. This was interesting. It was in the *Café Voisin* that he had touched a farewell glass with Luke Freeman, the one bosom friend of his life. He entered this *Café Voisin* with the thought of how vague would be the society which he would meet in such a reproduction of a famous Parisian haunt. He thought of a *café chantant* at Port Said, and said to himself, "It can't be worse than that." He was right

then. The world had no shambles of ghastly frivolity and debauchery like those of Port Said.

The *Café Voisin* had many visitors, and Shorland saw at a glance who they were—*libérés*, or ticket-of-leave men, a drunken soldier or two, and a few of that class who with an army are called camp-followers, in an English town roughs, in a French convict settlement *récidivistes*. He felt at once that he had entered upon a trying experience; but he also felt that the luck would be with him, as it had been with him so many times these late years. He sat down at a small table, and called to a haggard waitress near to bring him a cup of coffee. He then saw that there was another woman in the room. Leaning with her elbows on the bar and her chin in her hands, she fixed her eyes on him as he opened and made a pretence of reading *La Nouvelle Calédonie*. Looking up, he met her eyes again; there was hatred in them if ever he saw it, or what might be called constitutional *diablerie*. He felt that this woman, whoever she was, had power of a curious kind; too much power for her to be altogether vile, too physically healthy to be of that class to which the girl who handed him his coffee belonged. There was not a sign of gaudiness about her; not a ring, a necklace, or a bracelet. Her dress was of cotton, faintly pink and perfectly clean; her hair was brown, and waving away loosely from her forehead. But her eyes —was there a touch of insanity there? Perhaps because they were rather deeply set, though large, and because they seemed to glow in the shadows made by the brows, the strange intensity was deepened. But Shorland could not get rid of the feeling of active malevolence in them. The mouth was neither small nor sensuous, the chin was strong without being coarse,

the figure was not suggestive. The hands—confound the woman's eyes! Why could he not get rid of the feeling they gave him? She suddenly turned her head, not moving her chin from her hands, however, or altering her position, and said something to a man at her elbow—rather the wreck of a man, one who bore tokens of having been some time a gallant of the town, now only a disreputable citizen of a far from reputable French colony.

Immediately a murmur was heard: "A spy, an English spy!" From the mouths of absinthe-drinking *libérés* it passed to the mouths of rum-drinking *récidivistes*. It did not escape Blake Shorland's ears, but he betrayed no sign. He sipped his coffee and appeared absorbed in his paper, thinking carefully of the difficulties of his position. He knew that to rise now and make for the door would be of no advantage, for a number of the excited crowd were between him and it. To show fear might precipitate a catastrophe with this drunken mob. He had nerve and coolness.

Presently a dirty outcast passed him and rudely jostled his arm as he drank his coffee. He begged the other's pardon conventionally in French, and went on reading. A moment later the paper was snatched from his hand, and a red-faced unkempt scoundrel yelled in his face: "Spy of the devil! English thief!"

Then he rose quickly and stepped back to the wall, feeling for the spring in the sword-stick which he held closely pressed to his side. This same sword-stick had been of use to him on the Fly River in New Guinea.

"Down with the English spy!" rang through the room, joined to vile French oaths. Meanwhile the woman had not changed her position, but closely

watched the tumult which she herself had roused. She did not stir when she saw a glass hurled at the unoffending Englishman's head. A hand reached over and seized a bottle behind her. The bottle was raised and still she did not move, though her fingers pressed her cheeks with a spasmodic quickness. Three times Shorland had said, in well-controlled tones: "Frenchmen, I am no spy," but they gave him the lie with increasing uproar. Had not Gabrielle Rouget said that he was an English spy? As the bottle was poised in the air with a fiendish cry of "A baptism! a baptism!" and Shorland was debating on his chances of avoiding it, and on the wisdom of now drawing his weapon and cutting his way through the mob, there came from the door a call of "Hold! hold!" and a young officer dashed in, his arm raised against the brutal missile in the hands of the ticket-of-leave man, whose Chauvinism was a matter of absinthe, natural evil, and Gabrielle Rouget. "Wretches! scum of France!" he cried: "what is this here? And you, Gabrielle, do you sleep? Do you permit murder?"

The woman met the fire in his eyes without flinching, and some one answered for her. "He is an English spy."

"Take care, Gabrielle," the young officer went on, "take care—you go too far!" Waving back the sullen crowd, now joined by the woman who had not yet spoken, he said: "Who are you, monsieur? What is the trouble?"

Shorland drew from his pocket his letters and credentials. Gabrielle now stood at the young officer's elbow. As the papers were handed over, a photograph dropped from among them and fell to the floor face upward. Shorland stooped to pick it up, but, as

he did so, he heard a low exclamation from Gabrielle. He looked up. She pointed to the portrait, and said gaspingly: "My God—look! look!" She leaned forward and touched the portrait in his hand. "Look! look!" she said again. And then she paused, and a moment after laughed. But there was no mirth in her laughter—it was hollow and nervous. Meanwhile the young officer had glanced at the papers, and now handed them back, with the words: "All is right, monsieur—eh, Gabrielle, well, what is the matter?" But she drew back, keeping her eyes fixed on the Englishman, and did not answer.

The young officer stretched out his hand. "I am Alençon Barré, lieutenant, at your service. Let us go, monsieur."

But there was some unusual devilry working in that drunken crowd. The sight of an officer was not sufficient to awe them into obedience. Bad blood had been fired, and it was fed by some cause unknown to Alençon Barré, but to be understood fully hereafter. The mass surged forward, with cries of "Down with the Englishman!"

Alençon Barré drew his sword. "Villains!" he cried, and pressed the point against the breast of the leader, who drew back. Then Gabrielle's voice was heard: "No, no, my children," she said, "no more of that to-day—not to-day. Let the man go." Her face was white and drawn.

Shorland had been turning over in his mind all the events of the last few moments, and he thought as he looked at her that just such women had made a hell of the Paris Commune. But one thought dominated all others. What was the meaning of her excitement when she saw the portrait—the portrait of Luke Freeman?

He felt that he was standing on the verge of some tragic history.

Barré's sword again made a clear circle round him, and he said: "Shame, Frenchmen! This gentleman is no spy. He is the friend of the Governor—he is my friend. He is English? Well, where is the English flag, there are the French—good French—protected. Where is the French flag, there shall the English—good English—be safe."

As they moved towards the door Gabrielle came forward, and, touching Shorland's arm, said in English: "You will come again, monsieur? You shall be safe altogether. You will come?" Looking at her searchingly, he answered slowly: "Yes, I will come."

As they left the turbulent crowd behind them and stepped into the street, Barré said: "You should have gone at once to the *Hôtel du Gouverneur* and presented your letters, monsieur, or, at least, have avoided the *Café Voisin*. Noumea is the Whitechapel and the Pentonville of France, remember."

Shorland acknowledged his error, thanked his rescuer, enjoyed the situation, and was taken to Governor Rapont, by whom he was cordially received, and then turned over to the hospitality of the officers of the post. It was conveyed to him later by letters of commendation from the Governor that he should be free to go anywhere in the islands and to see whatever was to be seen, from convict prison to Hôtel Dieu.

II

Sitting that night in the rooms of Alençon Barré, this question was put to Blake Shorland by his host: "What did Gabrielle say to you as we left, monsieur?

And why did she act so, when she saw the portrait? I do not understand English well, and it was not quite clear."

Shorland had a clear conviction that he ought to take Alençon Barré into his confidence. If Gabrielle Rouget should have any special connection with Luke Freeman, there might be need of the active counsel of a friend like this young officer, whose face bespoke chivalry and gentle birth. Better that Alençon Barré should know all, than that he should know in part and some day unwittingly make trouble. So he raised frank eyes to those of the other, and told the story of the man whose portrait had so affected Gabrielle Rouget.

"Monsieur," said he, "I will tell you of this man first, and then it will be easier to answer your questions."

He took the portrait from his pocket, passed it over, and continued. "I received this portrait in a letter from England the day that I left Sydney, as I was getting aboard the boat. I placed it among those papers which you read. It fell out on the floor of the *café*, and you saw the rest. The man whose face is before you there, and who sent that to me, was my best friend in the days when I was at school and college. Afterwards, when a law-student, and, still later, when I began to practise my profession, we lived together in a rare old house at Fulham, with high garden walls and—but I forget, you do not know London perhaps. Yes? Well, the house is neither here nor there; but I like to think of those days and of that home. Luke Freeman—that was my friend's name—was an artist and a clever one. He had made a reputation by his paintings of Egyptian and Algerian life. He was

brilliant and original, an indefatigable worker. Suddenly, one winter, he became less industrious, fitful in his work, gloomy one day and elated the next, generally uncomfortable. What was the matter? Strange to say, although we were such friends, we chose different sets of society, and therefore seldom appeared at the same houses or knew the same people. He liked most things continental; he found his social pleasures in that polite Bohemia which indulges in midnight suppers and permits ladies to smoke cigarettes after dinner, which dines at rich men's tables and is hob-a-nob with Russian Counts, Persian Ministers, and German Barons. That was not to my taste, save as a kind of dramatic entertainment to be indulged in at intervals like a Drury Lane pantomime. But though I had no proof that such was the case, I knew Luke Freeman's malady to be a woman. I taxed him with it. He did not deny it. He was painting at the time, I remember, and he testily and unprofitably drew his brush across the face of a Copt woman he was working at, and bit off the end of a cigar. I asked him if it was another man's wife; he promptly said no. I asked him if there were any awkward complications, any inconsiderate pressure from the girl's parents or brothers; and he promptly told me to be damned. I told him I thought he ought to know that an ambitious man might as well drown himself at once as get a fast woman in his path. Then he showed a faculty for temper and profanity that stunned me. But the upshot was that I found the case straight enough to all appearances. The woman was a foreigner and not easy to win; was beautiful, had a fine voice, loved admiration, and possessed a scamp of a brother who wanted her to marry a foreigner, so that, according to

her father's will, a large portion of her fortune would come to him. . . . Were you going to speak? No? Very well. Things got worse and worse. Freeman neglected business and everything else, became a nuisance. He never offered to take me to see the lady, and I did not suggest it, did not even know where she lived. What galled me most in the matter was that Freeman had been for years attentive to a cousin of mine, Clare Hazard, almost my sister, indeed, since she had been brought up in my father's house; and I knew that from a child she had adored him. However, these things seldom work out according to the law of Nature, and so I chewed the cud of dissatisfaction and kept the thing from my cousin as long as I could. About the time matters seemed at a crisis I was taken ill, and was ordered south. My mother and Freeman accompanied me as far as Paris. Here Freeman left me to return to England, and in the *Café Voisin*, at Paris—yes, mark that—we had our farewell. I have never seen him since. While in Italy I was brought to death's door by my illness; and when I got up, Clare told me that Freeman was married and had gone to Egypt. She, poor girl, bore it well. I was savage, but it was too late. I was ordered to go to the South Seas, at least to take a long sea-voyage; and though I could not well afford it I started for Australia. On my way out I stopped off at Port Said to try and find Freeman in Egypt, but failed. I heard of him at Cairo, and learned also that his wife's brother had joined them. Two years passed, and then I got a letter from an old friend, saying that Freeman's wife had eloped with a Frenchman. Another year, and then came a letter from Freeman himself, saying that his wife was dead; that he had identified her body in the

Morgue at Paris—found drowned, and all that. He believed that remorse had driven her to suicide. But he had no trace of the brother, no trace of the villain whom he had scoured Europe and America over to find. Again, another three years, and now he writes me that he is going to be married to Clare Hazard on the twenty-sixth of this month. With that information came this portrait. I tell you all, M. Barré, because I feel that this woman Gabrielle has some connection with the past life of my friend Luke Freeman. She recognised the face, and you saw the effect. Now will you tell me what you know about her?"

Shorland had been much more communicative than was his custom. But he knew men. This man had done him a service, and that made towards friendship on both sides. He was an officer and a gentleman, and so he showed his hand. Then he wanted information and perhaps much more, though what that would be he could not yet tell.

M. Barré had smoked cigarettes freely during Shorland's narrative. At the end he said with peculiar emphasis: "Your friend's wife was surely a Frenchwoman?"

"Yes."

"Was her name Laroche?"

"Yes, that was it. Do you think that Lucile Laroche and Gabrielle—!"

"That Lucile Laroche and Gabrielle Rouget are one? Yes. But that Lucile Laroche was the wife of your friend? Well, that is another matter. But we shall see soon. Listen. A scoundrel, Henri Durien, was sent out here for killing an American at cards. The jury called it murder, but recommended him to mercy, and he escaped the guillotine. He had the

sympathy of the women, the Press did not deal hardly with him, and the Public Prosecutor did not seem to push the case as he might have done. But that was no matter to us. The woman, Gabrielle Rouget, followed him here, where he is a prisoner for life. He is engaged in road-making with other prisoners. She keeps the *Café Voisin*. Now here is the point which concerns your story. Once, when Gabrielle was permitted to see Henri, they quarrelled. I was acting as governor of the prison at the time, saw the meeting and heard the quarrel. No one else was near. Henri accused her of being intimate with a young officer of the post. I am sure there was no truth in it, for Gabrielle does not have followers of that kind. But Henri had got the idea from some source; perhaps by the convicts' 'Underground Railway,' which has connection even with the *Hôtel du Gouverneur*. Through it the prisoners know all that is going on, and more. In response to Henri's accusation Gabrielle replied: 'As I live, Henri, it is a lie.' He sardonically rejoined: 'But you do not live. You are dead, dead I tell you. You were found drowned and carried to the Morgue and properly identified—not by me, curse you, Lucile Laroche. And then you were properly buried, and not by me either, nor at my cost, curse you again. You are dead, I tell you!' She looked at him as she looked at you the other day, dazed and spectre-like, and said: 'Henri, I gave up my life once to a husband to please my brother. He was a villain, my brother. I gave it up a second time to please you, and because I loved you. I left behind me name, fortune, Paris, France, everything, to follow you here. I was willing to live here, while you lived, or till you should be free. And you curse me—you dare to curse *me!* Now I will give you some cause

to curse. You are a devil—I am a sinner. Henceforth I shall be devil and sinner too.' With that she left him. Since then she *has* been both devil and sinner, but not in the way he meant; simply a danger to the safety of this dangerous community; a Louise Michel—we had her here too!—without Louise Michel's high motives. Gabrielle Rouget may cause a revolt of the convicts some day, to secure the escape of Henri Durien, or to give them all a chance. The Governor does not believe it, but I do. You noticed what I said about the Morgue, and that?"

Shorland paced up and down the room for a time, and then said: "Great heaven, suppose that by some hideous chance this woman, Gabrielle Rouget, or Lucile Laroche, should prove to be Freeman's wife! The evidence is so overwhelming. There evidently was some trick, some strange mistake, about the Morgue and the burial. This is the fourteenth of January; Freeman is to be married on the twenty-sixth! Monsieur, if this woman should be his wife, there never was brewed an uglier scrape. There is Freeman—that's pitiful; there is Clare Hazard—that's pitiful and horrible. For nothing can be done; no cables from here, the *Belle Sauvage* gone, no vessels or sails for two weeks. Ah well, there's only one thing to do—find out the truth from Gabrielle if I can, and trust in Providence."

"Well spoken," said M. Barré. "Have some more champagne. I make the most of the pleasure of your company, and so I break another bottle. Besides, it may be the last I shall get for a time. There is trouble brewing at Bompari—a native insurrection—and we may have to move at any moment. However this Gabrielle affair turns out, you have your business to do.

You want to see the country, to study our life—well, come with us. We will house you, feed you as we feed, and you shall have your tobacco at army prices."

Much as Blake Shorland was moved by the events of the last few hours he was enough the soldier and the man of the world to face possible troubles without the loss of appetite, sleep, or nerve. He had cultivated a habit of deliberation which saved his digestion and preserved his mental poise; and he had a faculty for doing the right thing at the right time. From his stand-point, his late adventure in the *Café Voisin* was the right thing, serious as the results might have been or might yet be. He now promptly met the French officer's exuberance of spirits with a hearty gaiety, and drank his wine with genial compliment and happy anecdote. It was late when they parted; the Frenchman excited, beaming, joyous, the Englishman responsive, but cool in mind still.

III

After breakfast next morning Shorland expressed to M. Barré his intention of going to see Gabrielle Rouget. He was told that he must not go alone; a guard would be too conspicuous and might invite trouble; he himself would bear him company.

The hot January day was reflected from the red streets, white houses, and waxen leaves of the tropical foliage with enervating force. An occasional ex-convict sullenly lounged by, touching his cap as he was required by law; a native here and there leaned idly against a house-wall or a magnolia tree; ill-looking men and women loitered in the shade. A Government officer went languidly by in full uniform—even the

Governor wore uniform at all times to encourage respect —and the *cafés* were filling. Every hour was "absinthe-hour" in Noumea, which had improved on Paris in this particular. A knot of men stood at the door of the *Café Voisin* gesticulating nervously. One was pointing to a notice posted on the bulletin-board of the *café* announcing that all citizens must hold themselves in readiness to bear arms in case the rumoured insurrection among the natives proved serious. It was an evil-looking company who thus discussed Governor Rapont's commands. As the two passed in, Shorland noticed that one of the group made a menacing action towards Alençon Barré.

Gabrielle was talking to an ex-convict as they entered. Her face looked worn; there was a hectic spot on each cheek and dark circles round the eyes. There was something animal-like about the poise of the head and neck, something intense and daring about the woman altogether. Her companion muttered between his teeth: "The cursed English spy!"

But she turned on him sharply: "Go away, Gaspard, I have business. So have you—go." The ex-convict slowly left the *café* still muttering.

"Well, Gabrielle, how are your children this morning? They look gloomy enough for the guillotine, eh?" said M. Barré.

"They are much trouble, sometimes—my children."

"Last night, for instance."

"Last night. But monsieur was unwise. We do not love the English here. They do not find it comfortable on English soil, in Australia—my children! Not so comfortable as Louis Philippe and Louis Napoleon. Criminal kings with gold are welcome; criminal subjects without gold—ah, that is another matter,

monsieur. It is just the same. They may be gentlemen—many are; if they escape to Australia or go as *libérés*, they are hunted down. That is English, and they hate the English—my children."

Gabrielle's voice was directed to M. Barré, but her eyes were on Shorland.

"Well, Gabrielle, all English are not inhospitable. My friend here, we must be hospitable to him. The coals of fire, you know, Gabrielle. We owe him something for yesterday. He wishes to speak to you. Be careful, Gabrielle. No communist justice, Citizen Gabrielle." M. Barré smiled gaily.

Gabrielle smiled in reply, but it was not a pleasant smile, and she said: "Treachery, M. Barré—treachery in Noumea? There is no such thing. It is all fair in love and war. No quarter, no mercy, no hope. All is fair where all is foul, M. Barré."

M. Barré shrugged his shoulders pleasantly and replied: "If I had my way your freedom should be promptly curtailed, Gabrielle. You are an active citizen, but you are dangerous, truly."

"I like you better when you do not have your way. Yet my children do not hate you, M. Barré. You speak your thought, and they know what to expect. Your family have little more freedom in France than my children have here."

M. Barré looked at her keenly for an instant, then, lighting a cigarette, he said: "So, Gabrielle, so! That is enough. You wish to speak to M. Shorland—well!" He waved his hand to her and walked away from them.

Gabrielle paused a moment, looking sharply at Blake Shorland, then she said: "Monsieur will come with me?"

She led the way into another room, the boudoir,

sitting-room, breakfast-room, library, all in one. She parted the curtains at the window, letting the light fall upon the face of her companion, while hers remained in the shadow. He knew the trick, and moved out of the belt of light. He felt that he was dealing with a woman of singular astuteness, with one whose wickedness was unconventional and intrepid. To his mind there came on the instant the memory of a Rocky Mountain lioness that he had seen caged years before; lithe, watchful, nervously powerful, superior to its surroundings, yet mastered by those surroundings—the trick of a lock, not a trick of strength. He thought he saw in Gabrielle a woman who for a personal motive was trying to learn the trick of the lock in Noumea, France's farthest prison. For a moment they looked at each other steadily, then she said: "That portrait—let me see it."

The hand that she held out was unsteady, and it looked strangely white and cold. He drew the photograph from his pocket and handed it to her. A flush passed across her face as she looked at it, and was followed by a marked paleness. She gazed at the portrait for a moment, then her lips parted and a great sigh broke from her. She was about to hand it back to him, but an inspiration seemed to seize her, and she threw it on the floor and put her heel upon it. "That is the way I treated him," she said, and she ground her heel into the face of the portrait. Then she took her foot away. "See, see," she cried, "how his face is scarred and torn! I did that. Do you know what it is to torture one who loves you? No, you do not. You begin with shame and regret. But the sight of your lover's agonies, his indignation, his anger, madden you and you get the lust of cruelty. You

become insane. You make new wounds. You tear open old ones. You cut, you thrust, you bruise, you put acid in the sores—the sharpest nitric acid; and then you heal with a kiss of remorse, and that is acid too—carbolic acid, and it smells of death. They put it in the room where dead people are. Have you ever been to the Morgue in Paris? They use it there."

She took up the portrait. "Look," she said, "how his face is torn! Tell me of him."

"First, who are you?"

She steadied herself. "Who are you?" she asked.

"I am his friend, Blake Shorland."

"Yes, I remember your name." She threw her hands up with a laugh, a bitter hopeless laugh. Her eyes half closed, so that only light came from them, no colour. The head was thrown back with a defiant recklessness, and then she said: "I was Lucile Laroche, his wife—Luke Freeman's wife."

"But his wife died. He identified her in the Morgue."

"I do not know why I speak to you so, but I feel that the time has come to tell all to you. That was not his wife in the Morgue. It was his wife's sister, my sister whom my brother drowned for her money—he made her life such a misery! And he did not try to save her when he knew she meant to drown herself. She was not bad; she was a thousand times better than I am, a million times better than he was. He was a devil. But he is dead now too. . . . She was taken to the Morgue. She looked like me altogether; she wore a ring of mine, and she had a mark on her shoulder the same as one on mine; her initials were the same. Luke had never seen her. He believed that I lay dead there, and he buried her for me. I

thought at the time that it would be best I should be dead to him and to the world. And so I did not speak. It was all the same to my brother. He got what was left of my fortune, and I got what was left of hers. For I was dead, you see—dead, dead, dead!"

She paused again. Neither spoke for a moment. Shorland was thinking what all this meant to Clare Hazard and Luke Freeman.

"Where is he? What is he doing?" she said at length. "Tell me. I was—I am—his wife."

"Yes, you were—you are—his wife. But better if you had been that woman in the Morgue," he said without pity. What were this creature's feelings to him? There was his friend and the true-souled Clare.

"I know, I know," she replied. "Go on!"

"He is well. The man that was born when his wife lay before him in the Morgue has found another woman, a good woman who loves him and—"

"And is married to her?" interrupted Gabrielle, her face taking on again a shining whiteness. But, as though suddenly remembering something, she laughed that strange laugh which might have come from a soul irretrievably lost. "And is married to her?"

Blake Shorland thought of the lust of cruelty, of the wounds, and the acids of torture. "Not yet," he said; "but the marriage is set for the twenty-six of this month."

"How I could spoil all that!"

"Yes, you could spoil all that. But you have spoiled enough already. Don't you think that if Luke Freeman does marry, you had better be dead as you have been this last five years? To have spoiled one life ought to be enough to satisfy even a woman like you."

Her eyes looked through Blake Shorland's eyes and beyond them to something else; and then they closed.

When they opened again, she said: "It is strange that I never thought of his marrying again. And now I want to kill her—just for the moment. That is the selfish devil in me. Well, what is to be done, monsieur? There is the Morgue left. But then there is no Morgue here. Ah, well, we can make one, perhaps—we can make a Morgue, monsieur."

"Can't you see that he ought to be left the rest of his life in peace?"

"Yes, I can see that."

"Well, then!"

"Well—and then, monsieur? Ah, you did not wish him to marry me. He told me so. 'A fickle foreigner,' you said. And you were right, but it was not pleasant to me. I hated you then, though I had never spoken to you nor seen you; not because I wanted him, but because you interfered. He said once to me that you had told the truth in that. But—and *then,* monsieur?"

"Then continue to efface yourself. Continue to be the woman in the Morgue."

"But others know."

"Yes, Henri Durien knows and M. Barré suspects."

"So, you see."

"But Henri Durien is a prisoner for life; he cannot hear of the marriage unless you tell him. M. Barré is a gentleman: he is my friend; his memory will be dead like you."

"For M. Barré, well! But the other—Henri. How do you know that he is here for life? Men get pardoned, men get free, men—get free, I tell you."

Shorland noticed the interrupted word. He remembered it afterwards all too distinctly enough.

"The twenty-sixth, the twenty-sixth," she said.

Then a pause, and afterwards with a sudden sharpness: "Come to me on the twenty-fifth, and I will give you my reply, M. Shorland."

He still held the portrait in his hand. She stepped forward. "Let me see it again," she said.

He handed it to her: "You have spoiled a good face, Gabrielle."

"But the eyes are not hurt," she replied; "see how they look at one." She handed it back.

"Yes, kindly."

"And sadly. As though he still remembered Lucile. Lucile! I have not been called that name for a long time. It is on my grave-stone, you know. Ah, perhaps you do not know. You never saw my grave. I have. And on the tombstone is written this: *By Luke to Lucile.* And then beneath, where the grass almost hides it, the line: *I have followed my Star to the last.* You do not know what that line means; I will tell you. Once, when we were first married, he wrote me some verses, and he called them, 'My Star, Lucile.' Here is a verse—ah, why do you not smile, when I say I will tell you what he wrote? *Chut!* Women such as I have memories sometimes. One can admire the Heaven even if one lives in —— ah, you know! Listen." And with a voice that seemed far away and not part of herself she repeated these lines:

"In my sky of delight there's a beautiful Star;
'Tis the sun and the moon of my days;
And the doors of its glory are ever ajar,
And I live in the glow of its rays.
'Tis my winter of joy and my summer of rest,
'Tis my future, my present, my past;
And though storms fill the East and the clouds haunt the West,
I shall follow my Star to the last."

"There, that was to Lucile. What would he write to Gabrielle—to Henri's Gabrielle? How droll—how droll!" Again she laughed that laugh of eternal recklessness.

It filled Shorland this time with a sense of fear. He lost sight of everything—this strange and interesting woman, and the peculiar nature of the events in which he was sharing, and saw only Clare Hazard's ruined life, Luke Freeman's despair, and the fatal 26th of January, so near at hand. He could see no way out of the labyrinth of disgrace. It unnerved him more than anything that had ever happened to him, and he turned bewildered towards the door. He saw that while Gabrielle lived, a dead misfortune would be ever crouching at the threshold of Freeman's home, that whether the woman agreed to be silent or not, the hurt to Clare would remain the same. With an angry bitterness in his voice that he did not try to hide he said: "There is nothing more to be done now, Gabrielle, that I can see. But it is a crime —it is a pity!"

"A pity that he did not tell the truth on the gravestone—that he did not follow his star to the last, monsieur? How droll! And you should see how green the grass was on my grave! Yes, it is a pity."

But Shorland, heavy at heart, looked at her and said nothing more. He wondered why it was that he did not loathe her. Somehow, even in her shame, she compelled a kind of admiration and awe. She was the wreck of splendid possibilities. A poisonous vitality possessed her, but through it glowed a daring and a candour that belonged to her before she became wicked, and that now half redeemed her in the eyes of this man, who knew the worst of her. Even in her sin she

was loyal to the scoundrel for whom she had sacrificed two lives, her own and another's. Her brow might flush with shame of the mad deed that turned her life awry, and of the degradation of her present surroundings; but her eyes looked straight into those of Shorland without wavering, with the pride of strength if not of goodness.

"Yes, there is one thing more," she said. "Give me that portrait to keep—until the 25th. Then you may take it—from the woman in the Morgue."

Shorland thought for a moment. She had spoken just now without sneering, without bravado, without hardness. He felt that behind this woman's outward cruelty and varying moods there was something working that perhaps might be trusted, something in Luke's interest. He was certain that this portrait had moved her deeply. Had she come to that period of reaction in evil when there is an agonised desire to turn back towards the good? He gave the portrait to her.

IV

Sitting in Alençon Barré's room an hour later, Shorland told him in substance the result of his conference with Gabrielle, and begged his consideration for Luke if the worst should happen. Alençon Barré gave his word as a man of honour that the matter should be sacred to him. As they sat there, a messenger came from the commandant to say that the detachment was to start that afternoon for Bompari. Then a note was handed to Shorland from Governor Rapont offering him a horse and a native servant if he chose to go with the troops. This was what Shorland had come for—news and adventure. He did not hesitate, though the

shadow of the twenty-fifth was hanging over him. He felt his helplessness in the matter, but determined to try to be back in Noumea on that date. Not that he expected anything definite, but because he had a feeling that where Gabrielle was on that day he ought to be.

For two days they travelled, the friendship between them growing hourly closer. It was the swift amalgamation of two kindred natures in the flame of a perfect sincerity, for even with the dramatic element so strongly developed in him, the Englishman was downright and true. His friendship was as tenacious as his head was cool.

On the evening of the third day Shorland noticed that the strap of his spur was frayed. He told his native servant to attend to it. Next morning as they were starting he saw that the strap had not been mended or replaced. His language on the occasion was pointed and confident. The fact is, he was angry with himself for trusting anything to a servant. He was not used to such a luxury, and he made up his mind to live for the rest of the campaign without a servant, as he had done all his life long.

The two friends rode side by side for miles through the jungle of fern and palm, and then began to enter a more open but scrubby country. The scouts could be seen half a mile ahead. Not a sign of natives had been discovered on the march. More than once Barré had expressed his anxiety at this. He knew it pointed to concentrated trouble ahead, and, just as they neared the edge of the free country, he rose in his saddle and looked around carefully. Shorland imitated his action, and, as he resumed his seat, he felt his spur-strap break. He leaned back, and drew up the foot to take off the spur. As he did so, he felt a sudden twitch

at his side, and Barré swayed in his saddle with a spear in the groin. Shorland caught him and prevented him falling to the ground. A wild cry rose from the jungle behind and from the clearing ahead, and in a moment the infuriated French soldiers were in the thick of a hand-to-hand fray under a rain of spears and clubs. The spear that had struck Barré would have struck Shorland had he not bent backward when he did. As it was the weapon had torn a piece of cloth from his coat.

A moment, and the wounded man was lifted to the ground. The surgeon shook his head in sad negation. Death already blanched the young officer's face. Shorland looked into the misty eyes with a sadness only known to those who can gauge the regard of men who suffer for each other. Four days ago this gallant young officer had taken risk for him, had saved him from injury, perhaps death; to-day the spear meant for him had stricken down this same young officer, never to rise again. The vicarious sacrifice seemed none the less noble to the Englishman because it was involuntary and an accident. The only point clear in his mind was that had he not leant back, Barré would be the whole man and he the wounded one.

"How goes it, my friend?" said Shorland, bending over him.

Alençon Barré looked up, agony twitching his nostrils and a dry white line on his lips. "Ah, *mon camarade*," he answered huskily, "it is in action—that is much; it is for France, that is more to me—everything. They would not let me serve France in Paris, but I die for her in New Caledonia. I have lived six-and-twenty years. I have loved the world. Many men have been kind, and once there was a woman—and I shall see her

soon, quite soon. It is strange. The eyes will become blind, and then they will open, and—ah!" His fingers closed convulsively on those of Blake Shorland. When the ghastly tremor, the deadly corrosions of the poisoned spear passed he said: "So—so! It is the end. *C'est bien, c'est bien!*"

All round them the fight raged, and French soldiers were repeating English bravery in the Soudan.

"It is not against a great enemy, but it is good," said the wounded man as he heard the conquering cries of a handful of soldiers punishing ten times their numbers. "You remember Prince Eugène and the assegais?"

"I remember."

"Our Houses were enemies, but we were friends, he and I. And so, and so, you see, it is the same for both."

Again the teeth of the devouring poison fastened on him, and, when it left him, a grey pallor had settled upon the face.

Blake Shorland said to him gently: "How do you feel about it all?"

As if in gentle protest the head moved slightly. "All's well, all's well," the low voice said.

A pause, in which the cries of the wounded came through the smoke, and then the dying man, feeling the approach of another convulsion, said: "A cigarette, *mon ami.*"

Blake Shorland put a cigarette between his lips and lighted it.

"And now a little wine," the fallen soldier added.

The surgeon, who had come again for a moment, nodded and said: "It may help."

Barré's native servant brought a bottle of champagne

intended to be drunk after the expected victory, but not in this fashion!

Shorland understood. This brave young soldier of a dispossessed family wished to show no fear of pain, no lack of outward and physical courage in the approaching and final shock. He must do something that was conventional, natural, habitual, that would take his mind from the thing itself. At heart he was right. The rest was a question of living like a strong-nerved soldier to the last. The tobacco-smoke curled feebly from his lips, and was swallowed up in the clouds of powder-smoke that circled round them. With his head on his native servant's knee he watched Shorland uncork the bottle and pour the wine into the surgeon's medicine-glass. It was put in his fingers; he sipped it once and then drank it all. "Again," he said.

Again it was filled. The cigarette was smoked nearly to the end. Shorland must unburden his mind of one thought, and he said: "You took what was meant for me, my friend."

"Ah, no, no! It was the fortune, we will say the good fortune. *C'est bien!*" Then, "The wine, the wine," he said, and his fingers again clasped those of Shorland tremblingly. He took the glass in his right hand and lifted it. "God guard all at home, God keep France!" he said. He was about to place the glass to his lips, when a tremor seized him, and the glass fell from his hand. He fell back, his breath quick and vanishing, his eyes closing, and a faint smile upon his lips. "It is always the same with France," he said; "always the same." And he was gone.

V

The French had bought their victory dear with the death of Alençon Barré, their favourite officer. When they turned their backs upon a quelled insurrection, there was a gap that not even French buoyancy could fill. On the morning of the twenty-fifth they neared Noumea. Shorland thought of all that day meant to Luke and Clare. He was helpless to alter the course of events, to stay a terrible possibility.

"You can never trust a woman of Gabrielle's stamp," he said to himself, as they rode along through valleys of ferns, grenadillas, and limes. "They have no base-line of duty; they either rend themselves or rend others, but rend they must, hearts and not garments. Henri Durien knows, and she knows, and Alençon Barré knew, poor boy! But what Barré knew is buried with him back there under the palms. Luke and Clare are to be married to-morrow—God help them! And I can see them in their home, he standing by the fire-place in his old way—it's winter there—and looking down at Clare; and on the other side of the fireplace sits the sister of the Woman in the Morgue, waiting for the happiest moment in the lives of these two before her. And when it comes, as she did with the portrait, as she did with him before, she will set her foot upon his face and then on Clare's; only neither Luke nor Clare will live again after that crucifixion." Then aloud: "Hello! what's that?—a messenger riding hard to meet us! Smoke in the direction of Noumea and sound of firing! What's that, doctor? Convicts re-volted, made a break at the prison and on the way to the quarries at the same moment! Of course—seized

the time when the post was weakest, helped by ticket-of-leave-men and led by Henri Durien, Gaspard, and Gabrielle Rouget. Gabrielle Rouget, eh! And this is the twenty-fifth! Yes, I will take Barré's horse, captain, thank you; it is fresher than mine. Away we go! Egad, they're at it, doctor! Hear the rifles!"

Answering to the leader's cry of "Forward, forward!" the detachment dashed into the streets of this little Paris, which, after the fashion of its far-away mother, was dipping its hands in Revolution. Outcast and criminal France were arrayed against military France once more. A handful of guards in the prison at Ile Nou were bravely holding in check a ruthless mob of convicts; and a crowd of convicts in the street keeping back a determined military force. Part of the newly-arrived reinforcements proceeded to Ile Nou, part moved towards the barricade. Shorland went to the barricade.

The convicts had the *Café Voisin* in their rear. As the reinforcements joined the besieging party a cheer arose, and a sally was made upon the barricade. It was a hail of fire meeting a slighter rain of fire—a cry of coming victory cutting through a sullen roar of despair. The square in which the convicts were massed was a trench of blood and bodies; but they fought on. There was but one hope—to break out, to meet the soldiers hand to hand and fight for passage to the friendly jungle and to the sea, where they might trust to that Providence who appears to help even the wicked sometimes. As Shorland looked upon the scene he thought of Alençon Barré's words: "It is always the same with France, always the same."

The fight grew fiercer, the soldiers pressed nearer. And now one clear voice was heard above the din,

"Forward, forward, my children!" and some one sprang upon the outer barricade. It was the plotter of the revolt, the leader, the manager of the "Underground Railway," the beloved of the convicts—Gabrielle Rouget.

The sunlight glorified her flying hair and vivid dress—vivid with the blood of the fallen. Her arms, her shoulders, her feet were bare; all that she could spare from her body had gone to bind the wounds of her desperate comrades. In her hands she held a carbine. As she stood for an instant unmoving, the firing, as if by magic, ceased. She raised a hand. "We will have the guillotine in Paris," she said; "but not the hell of exile here."

Then Henri Durien, the convict, sprang up beside her; the man for whom she had made a life's sacrifice—for whom she had come to this! His head was bandaged and clotted with blood; his eyes shone with the fierceness of an animal at bay. Close after him crowded the handful of his frenzied compatriots in crime.

Then a rifle-crack was heard, and Henri Durien fell at the feet of Gabrielle. The wave on the barricade quivered, and then Gabrielle's voice was heard crying, "Avenge him! Free yourselves, my children! Death is better than prison!"

The wave fell in red turmoil on the breakers. And still Gabrielle stood alone above the body of Henri Durien; but the carbine was fallen from her hands. She stood as one awaiting death, her eyes upon the unmoving form at her feet. The soldiers watched her, but no one fired. Her face was white; but in the eyes there was a wild triumph. She wanted death now; but these French soldiers had not the heart to kill her.

When she saw that, she leaned and thrust a hand into the bleeding bosom of Henri Durien, and holding it aloft cried: "For this blood men must die." Stooping again she seized the carbine and levelled it at the officer in command. Before she could pull the trigger some one fired, and she fell across the body of her lover. A moment afterwards Shorland stood beside her. She was shot through the lungs.

He stooped over her. "Gabrielle, Gabrielle!" he said.

"Yes, yes, I know—I saw you. This is the twenty-fifth. He will be married to-morrow—Luke. I owed it to him to die; I owed it to Henri to die this way."

She drew the scarred portrait of Luke Freeman from her bosom and gave it over.

"His eyes made me," she said. "They haunted me. Well, it is all done. I am sorry, ah! Never tell him of this. I go away—away—with Henri."

She closed her eyes and was still for a moment; so still that he thought her dead. But she looked up at him again and said with her last breath: "I am—the Woman in the Morgue—always—now!"

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